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The expression of modifiers and arguments in the noun phrase and beyond

A typological study

van Rijn, M.A.

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Marlou van Rijn

The expression of modifiers and arguments in the noun phrase and beyond

A typological study

A major semantic distinction obtaining in phrases and clauses is that between modifiers and arguments. While arguments are inherent to the meaning of the head of the phrase or clause, modifiers merely supplement the head with additional information. Typical examples of argument-taking heads are verbs and adpositions, but also relational nouns such as kinship terms and body part terms. Typical examples of modifier-taking heads are non-relational nouns, such as those denoting concrete, inanimate objects, like 'pot' or 'pen'.

This dissertation investigates to what extent the modifier/argument opposition constrains the morphosyntactic expression of possessive NPs, adpositional phrases and verbal main clauses. Using data of 64 different languages from all over the world, it is shown that the modifier/argument distinction strongly correlates with four typological parameters: locus of marking, the referentiality of person marking, the formal bondedness of person marking, and identity of marking. The first three parameters apply to possessive NPs: it is shown that possessive modifiers, as functionally optional enrichments of the head, are more likely to be the locus of morphosyntactic marking than possessive arguments. Also, possessive modifiers tend to be expressed by more referential and more formally independent person markers than possessive arguments. The final parameter applies beyond the domain of the NP: it is shown that if a language uses the same morphosyntactic form to mark modifiers in phrases and arguments in clauses, it also uses this form to mark arguments in phrases. Together, these findings demonstrate the typological relevance of the semantic opposition between modifiers and arguments, in the possessive NP and beyond.

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UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM
Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication

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List of abbreviations

1	first person	INDF	indefinite
2	second person	INS	instrumental
3	third person	IPFV	imperfective
A	actor	LOC	locative
ABL	ablative	M	masculine
ABS	absolutive	MIN	minimal number
ACC	accusative	N	neuter
ACT	active	NF	non-feminine
AL	alienable	NFOC	non-focus
ALL	allative	NFUT	non-future
ANTIP	antipassive	NOM	nominative
AOR	aorist tense	NPST	non-past
ART	article	NVIS	non-visual sensory evidence
ASS	associative	OBJ	object
ATTR	attributive marker	OBL	oblique
AUG	augmentative	OPOSTP	object of postposition
C	common	PART	partitive
CM	conjugation marker	PFV	perfective
COM	comitative	PL	plural
COMPL	completive	POSS	possessive
CONN	connective	POT	potential
DAT	dative	PRS	present
DECL	declarative	PST	past
DEF	definite	REC	recent
ERG	ergative	REL	relative
FIN	finite	REM	remote
FOC	focus	REP	reportative
FUT	future	REPV	reportative
GEN	genitive	SG	singular
HUM	human	SUP	superessive
INAL	inalienable	TR	transitive
INCL	inclusive	VIS	visible

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- Appendix I: Overview of the data used in Chapter 2
- Appendix II: Additional data tables for Chapter 3
- Appendix III: List of the 877 unique alignment patterns used in Chapter 4
- Appendix IV: Overview of the data used in Chapter 4