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A typological study

van Rijn, M.A.

Publication date

2017

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Citation for published version (APA):

van Rijn, M. A. (2017). *The expression of modifiers and arguments in the noun phrase and beyond: A typological study*. LOT.

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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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Netherlands
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ISBN 978-94-6093-237-3

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UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM
Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication

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Landelijke Onderzoekschool Taalwetenschap

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Published by
LOT
Trans 10
3512 JK Utrecht
The Netherlands

phone: +31 30 253 6111

e-mail: lot@uu.nl
<http://www.lotschool.nl>

Cover photo: The Bungehuis. Taken by Wietse de Graaf.

ISBN: 978-94-6093-237-3
NUR 616

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The expression of modifiers and arguments
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ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde
commissie, in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel
op donderdag 15 juni 2017, te 10.00 uur

door

Marlou Anne van Rijn
geboren te Delft

Promotiecommissie

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Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen

Acknowledgments

A PhD thesis doesn't magically appear out of nowhere – it requires hard work, discipline, dedication, perseverance and... a little help from a lot of people. I am grateful to everybody who, over the course of the past five years, contributed in one way or another to the completion of this book. There are too many of you to mention below, but a big thank you goes to each one of you.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisors, Kees and Eva, for their advice, their careful reading, thorough comments, stimulating discussions, and for always being available for questions. Kees, thank you for your patience and positivity. Even as a student, I always looked forward to our meetings, knowing that I would leave your office feeling uplifted, confident and with my motivation and spirit renewed. Thank you Eva, for listening and understanding, for your calming words in moments of self-doubt and utter despair, for the good times on conference trips, and for the fun we had, and still have, collaborating. I know few people that are both as smart and as caring as you are.

I furthermore wish to thank Marian Klamer, Johanna Nichols, Roland Pfau, Frank Seifart and Arjen Versloot for being members of my thesis committee. Thanks also go to Frank Seifart for his comments on earlier versions of Chapter 3, to Rob Schoonen and Arjen Versloot, who provided me with helpful advice on statistical analyses, and to Jan-Willem van Leussen, who generated the list of the 877 alignment patterns used in the data analysis in Chapter 4. A special thank you goes to Lachlan Mackenzie, for his super-quick but thorough corrections of the manuscript in its final stages.

Another group of people who were essential to the research carried out in this thesis are the many linguists that helped me analyze the languages of their respective expertise: Alexandra Aikhenvald, Gregory Anderson, E. Annamalai, Felix Ameka, Jonathan Bobaljik, Slavomír Čéplö, Özlem Çetinoğlu, Shirley Chapman, Hilary Chappell, Denis Creissels, Thomas Crowell, Mark Donohue, Margreet Dorleijn, Gorka Elordieta Alcibar, Patience Epps, Michael Fortescue, Zygmunt Frajzyngier, Ash Göksel, Dick Grune, Ekaterina Gruzdeva, Alice Harris, George Hewitt, José Ignacio Hualde, Dmitry Idiatov, Bram Jagersma, István Kenesei, Geoffrey Kimball, Hideki Kishimoto, Silvia Kouwenberg, Constance Kutch-Lojenga, Charles Li, Bill McGregor, Francesca Merlan, David Morrison, Claire Moyse-Faurie, Sadaf Munshi, Paul Newman, Knut Olawsky, John Peterson, Francesc Queixalós, Ger Reesink, Mechtild Reh, Keren Rice, Alan Rumsey, Rami Saari, Stef Spronck, Miriam van Staden, Thomas Stolz, Stacy

Teng, Sandra Thompson, Edward Vajda, Martine Vanhove, Lourens de Vries and Laurel Watkins. I am also indebted to Alena Witzlack-Makarevich for helpful comments and suggestions. My gratitude furthermore goes to everybody at the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig – in particular Martin Haspelmath and Susanne Michaelis – for their warm welcome and for sharing their thoughts on my work with me. Thank you, my former ‘WG Mitbewohners’ in Leipzig, for the wonderful time. Es war übels cool.

It feels strange not to roam the halls of the Bungehuis anymore – a place where I studied and worked for over a decade with such great pleasure. I am grateful to the entire Linguistics Department of the University of Amsterdam – including the Functional Discourse Grammar and Language Description and Typology research groups – for making it such a fun time, and for teaching me so much. This also goes for my (former and current) fellow PhDs: Klaas, Sterre, Bibi, Konrad, Iris, Tiffany, Tessa, Rosa, Jeroen, Mirjam, Sophie, Margot, Joke, Jan-Willem, Margreet, Jelke, Matthias, Jing, Vadim, Marjolein, Josefiën and all others. Thank you for the ‘borrels’, lunches and coffee breaks, the advice and support, and the laughs and jokes.

Finally, I turn to the many people who were there for me outside the world of academia. Thanks to the ever vibrant Studentenkoor Amsterdam (SKA) for the beautiful music we so passionately make and for knowing how to party. Thank you, Sanne and Klaas, for being my fabulous paranympths. To my many friends – the ‘Spekjes’, the ‘LekkeredingSKAs’, ‘Lichting 2005’, Nadine, Rosalinde, Lizet, Paula and Marieke: you are the most wonderful group of women anyone could have in her life. Last but not least, I want to thank my family – Margreet, familie de Haan, my opa’s and oma’s and everybody else – for their unconditional love and endless support. Mama, Papa, Sanne, Niels and Geert, I couldn’t have done it without you.

Amsterdam, January 2017

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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