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A typological study

van Rijn, M.A.

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Summary in English

The expression of modifiers and arguments in the noun phrase and beyond: A typological study

Lexical items that occur in a phrase or clause enter into dependency relations. In these relations, the lexical item that is the head governs, or subcategorizes for, the dependent and determines the syntactic category and distribution of the entire constituent. In keeping with observations made within the framework of Functional Discourse Grammar (henceforth FDG; Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008), this thesis argues that dependency relations come in two semantic types: head-modifier relations and head-argument relations. While arguments are inherent to the meaning of the head, modifiers merely supplement the head with additional information. Although the opposition between modifiers and arguments is widely acknowledged as applying to verbal heads and their dependents, it also applies to nominal heads (see e.g. Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 305–307). Examples of head-argument relations are those between a verbal predicate and its core argument(s), an adposition and its argument, and those between a relational noun (typically a kinship term or body part term) and its possessor. Examples of head-modifier relations are those between a noun and an attributive adjective, a verb and a (manner/degree) adverb, and those between a non-relational noun (typically one denoting a concrete, inanimate object, such as ‘pen’ or ‘pot’) and its possessor.

This thesis investigates the extent to which the semantic opposition between modifiers and arguments constrains the cross-linguistic expression of different dependency relations. First, I focus on possessive NPs (i.e. the semantic opposition between relational and non-relational nouns), and then I go on to consider adpositional phrases and verbal main clauses as well. For possessive NPs, I study three dimensions of expression: (i) the location (or *locus*) of possessive marking (in Chapter 2), (ii) the degree of referentiality of possessive person marking, and (iii) the degree of formal independence of possessive person marking (both in Chapter 3). The fourth dimension studied (in Chapter 4) is (iv) the degree of identical coding of possessive NPs, adpositional phrases, and one- and two-participant verbal main clauses.

In Chapter 2, I focus on languages that make a formal distinction between modifiers and arguments in possessive NPs – this is traditionally referred to as a distinction between *alienable* and *inalienable possession*. The data indicate that languages with this distinction prefer to mark the modifier in head-modifier

relations (“alienable possession”) and to mark the head in head-argument relations (“inalienable possession”). These preferences yield two cross-linguistic generalizations concerning locus of marking: if a language marks the head in head-modifier relations, it also marks the head in head-argument relations, and if a language marks the argument, it also marks the modifier. Both findings can be explained by the fact that the semantic relation between a head and a modifier is not inherent to the meaning of the head. As a result, these relations call more strongly for morphosyntactic marking than head-argument relations.

In this second chapter, I apply a novel analysis of possessive person markers in terms of locus, distinguishing referential markers from agreement markers on the basis of the distribution of (possessor) role information between the person marker and the possessor NP. Not only does this distinction yield a theoretical refinement of traditional locus of marking typology, it also reveals another cross-linguistic tendency: if, in a language, head-argument relations are expressed by referential markers, head-modifier relations are expressed by referential markers as well. This tendency captures the fact that, cross-linguistically, modifiers are inherently more likely to receive a referential expression than arguments – a finding that can also be attributed to the functional markedness of modifiers as optional enrichments of the head.

The referential potential of possessive person markers is investigated further in Chapter 3. Here, I study two dimensions of expression: the degree of referentiality and the degree of formal independence of possessive person forms, focusing again on languages with an adnominal alienability distinction. In contrast to much earlier work, referential potential (function) and morpho-phonological expression type (form) are studied as two independent typological parameters. The data show that, in individual languages, person marking in head-modifier relations is never less referential and never less formally independent than person marking in head-argument relations. Hence, cross-linguistically, the expression of possessive modifiers tends to be more referential and more formally independent than the expression of possessive arguments. This finding can again be attributed to the functional markedness of modifiers as compared to arguments, as a result of which modifiers are in need of more expressive means of coding than arguments. It furthermore supports the widely held assumption that inalienable possessive marking shows a higher degree of grammaticalization than alienable possessive marking, but for function and form independently.

In Chapter 3, I also show that the relationship between referential potential (function) and morpho-phonological expression type (form) is relative, rather than absolute. It is shown that markers of a high degree of referentiality

need not also have a high degree of formal independence, and, conversely, that markers of a low degree of referentiality need not also have a low degree of formal independence. Rather, in individual languages, higher referential markers are never less formally independent than lower referential markers. From a diachronic perspective, this finding suggests that functional and formal changes proceed in the same direction, but need not proceed at the same pace. This is a much more specific relationship between function and form than is often presumed in the literature.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I show that there is a robust relationship between the opposition between modifiers and arguments and the degree to which languages use the same morphosyntactic forms to mark the dependency relation in possessive NPs, adpositional phrases and verbal main clauses. The extent to which these dependency relations receive the same means of coding is often sensitive to properties of the head, such as the type of possessed noun or adposition, or referential properties of the modifier or argument, such as person, humanness and (pro)nominality. In this study, I therefore take such conditions on patterns of identical coding into account. The dependency relations studied form three logical classes: modifiers in phrases (possessors of non-relational nouns), arguments in phrases (possessors of relational nouns, arguments of adpositions), and arguments in clauses (the core arguments of one- and two-participant verbal predicates). The data reveal that if, in a language, modifiers in phrases receive the same coding – e.g. the same person marker or case form – as one or more arguments in clauses, arguments in phrases receive this coding strategy as well. This finding shows that both the semantic type of dependency relation (head-modifier vs. head-argument) and the syntactic category of the constituent (phrase vs. clause) constrain the degree of identical coding of the different dependency relations studied.

Another, more specific finding of this study is that if, in a language, possessors of relational nouns receive the same coding as one or more arguments in clauses, then arguments in adpositional phrases receive this coding strategy as well. This result can be explained by the phrasal nature of possessive NPs and adpositional phrases, on the one hand, and by the diachronic link between adpositional phrases and both possessive NPs and verbal main clauses, on the other.

In sum, the findings obtained in this thesis demonstrate that the cross-linguistic expression of dependency relations is highly sensitive to the semantic opposition between modifiers and arguments, in the possessive NP and beyond.