

### Possession and affectedness in verb alternations

On the intuition shared by various linguists, the form (1b) (aka possessor ascension) differs in its meaning from nominal possessives, (1a), in that in (1b) the possessor appears somehow more affected than in (1a) (cf. Chappel & McGregor 1996, Heine 1997). At the same time, both sentences might describe one and the same scenario.

(1) a. *Peter firmly holds her arm.* (NPoss form)    b. *Peter firmly holds her by the arm.* (ACC form)

I will report on the results of a study using data primarily drawn from German, and showing that, not only (1a) and (1b) deserve distinct semantic analyses, but also, different from the common assumption (cf. Levin 1993, Chappell & McGregor 1996, Dowty 2001), the alternation as in (1), embraces two semantically different kinds of alternation, i.e., (1b) is polysemous. The first reading of (1b) is indeed related to the expression of affectedness (here **affectedness alternation**), while the second reading encodes the possessor as targeted by the action (here **target alternation**). I will offer a novel polysemic account for the structures in each of the two alternations claiming that, in each case, ACC form is derived from NPoss form through the application of two distinct lexical rules in the spirit of the proposed by Dowty (2001). These lexical rules apply under filtering conditions that allow to limit the range of predicates participating in the alternations based on the predicate semantics. For the sake of brevity, I limit the data in this abstract to English but discuss all three languages in my presentation.

My basic assumptions are: 1. The meaning of verbs includes semantic components that lead to different syntactic realizations of their argument structure (cf. Fillmore 1970, Guerssel 1986, Levin 1993); 2. The syntactic distribution of a verb is a window into its semantic (cf. Krifka 2004).

**AFFECTEDNESS ALTERNATION.** The first lexical rule I propose applies to transitive predicates enriching them in respect to their original meaning with the entailment of the possessor's affectedness (as related to the ability of an entity to physically experience the action independently of the result state). The lexical rule works under a filtering condition that I call **SPREADING CONDITION** (developed on the base of Dowty's (2001) "part-to-whole" spread). It applies to *hit*, *cut*, *touch*, and *hold* verbal classes and filters out other verbal classes not participating in affectedness alternation (e.g., *break* as in \**Peter broke her on the arm*). The spreading condition is twofold: (i) the predicate must not entail a specific result state (to filter out *break* verbs and other resultatives); (ii) animacy condition: possessor must be able to physically perceive the action (to filter out *hold* predicates occurring with inanimates, as in (2), where the possessor does not receive an affectee reading on the aforementioned understanding).

(2) a. *Peter firmly holds the stalk of the plant.*        b. *Peter firmly holds the plant by the stalk.*

**TARGETING ALTERNATION.** The application of a lexical rule, different from the one described above, allows to highlight the entity that is targeted by the action denoted by the predicate. The spreading conditions here slightly differ from the ones proposed for the affectedness alternation: (i) the predicate must not entail a specific result state (cf. above); (ii) the possessor and the possessee must stand in a part-whole relationship (incl. body-part relationships). I assume that participating verbs, along with the physical contact component, also contain a target component. This target component is the one that undergoes the application of the proposed lexical rule.

The spreading conditions formulated for each lexical rule overlap (cf. (i)) and are, therefore, both applicable to a certain range of predicates (e.g., *hold* verbs). That gives rise to polysemous expressions, (1b), that either can express affectedness or mark the targeted participant. Such expressions can usually be disambiguated in the context. However, if it is not the case, to express affectedness, an alternative form – external possessive constructions where the possessor is marked for dative – can be used. This form is available for the verbs with a target component and will be discussed in more detail in my presentation.

## References

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