

Grammatical Constructions

THEIR FORM AND MEANING

EDITED BY
MASAYOSHI SHIBATANI
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Grammatical Constructions

To Chuck Fillmore

**for being the model of a good linguist, and
for sharing his joy of doing good linguistics**

Foreword

The last decade or so has seen the emergence of the investigation of grammatical constructions. This work has taken as a premise that grammatical constructions in a given language often have unique semantic, pragmatic, and grammatical properties, and that they therefore merit close study to determine their role in the complex interplay of linguistic resources that a speaker brings to a communicative situation.

The papers in this volume are dedicated to Charles J. Fillmore in recognition of his leadership in the study of constructions. Friends of Chuck's from all over the world have joined us in this project of expressing our appreciation of his contributions to our understanding of the way in which semantic, pragmatic, and grammatical factors come together in various constructions found in a variety of languages.

Several approaches to constructions are represented here. One approach is to study a relatively lexicalized construction, as does Goldberg in her study of the 'way' construction. Several other authors concern themselves with a traditional construction, such as conditionals (McCawley and Sweetser), possessor-raising constructions (O'Connor), relative clauses (Matsumoto), or *te*-clauses in Japanese (Hasegawa). The interactions among semantic verb types and argument types are discussed by Shibatani (applicatives and benefactives), Slobin (verbs of motion), Talmy (event frames), and Van Valin and Wilkins ('effector' roles), while constructions at the level of the noun phrase are the focus of the papers by Brugman (modified noun phrases) and Watters (deverbal nominals).

These papers reflect a range of perspectives on grammatical constructions. What they all share is a commitment to the study of language as an intricate set of cognitive and social skills exquisitely adapted for human communication, with all that this implies for the semantic, pragmatic, and grammatical richness of grammatical constructions.

*Kobe and Santa Barbara
April 1995*

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List of Symbols and Abbreviations

#	pragmatically deviant
%	idiolectal/dialectal variable acceptability
?	questionable acceptability
??	low acceptability
*	ungrammatical
*?	almost ungrammatical
1, 2, etc.	Bantu noun classes
1POSS, 2POSS, etc.	first person possessive, second person possessive, etc.
1S, 2P, etc.	first person singular, second person plural, etc.
3SF	third person singular feminine
3SM	third person singular masculine
ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
ADV	adverbial clause-marker
ADVERS	adversative clause-marker
ALL	allative
APPL	applicative
ART	article
ASP	aspect
BEN	benefactive
CADV	controlled adverbial clause-marker
CAUS	causative
COMP	comparative
COMPL	complementizer
CONJ	conjunction
COP	copula
DAT	dative
DEM	demonstrative
DET	determiner
DIR	direction
DT	detransitivizer

EVID	evidential
FAM. DIM	familiar diminutive
FOC	focus
FV	final vowel
GEN	genitive
IMP. PASS	impersonal passive
IMPF	imperfect
IND	indicative
INST	instrumental
IRR	irrealis
LDR	long-distance reflexive
LOC	locative
NEG	negative
NMLZR	nominalizer
NOM	nominative
NPAST	non-past
OBL	oblique
PASS	passive
PAST	past tense
PFV	perfective
POSS	possessor
PRES	present tense
PROG	progressive
Q	question-marker
REFL	reflexive
TOP	topic
VIA	route-instrument
VOL	volitional

Contents

List of Contributors	xi
List of Symbols and Abbreviations	xv
1. Inalienability and the Interpretation of Modified Noun Phrases <i>Claudia Brugman</i>	I
2. Making One's Way Through the Data <i>Adele E. Goldberg</i>	29
3. Toward a Description of <i>Te</i> -linkage in Japanese <i>Yoko Hasegawa</i>	55
4. Conversational Scorekeeping and the Interpretation of Conditional Sentences <i>James D. McCawley</i>	77
5. Interaction of Factors in Construal: Japanese Relative Clauses <i>Yoshiko Matsumoto</i>	103
6. The Situated Interpretation of Possessor-Raising <i>Mary Catherine O'Connor</i>	125
7. Applicatives and Benefactives: A Cognitive Account <i>Masayoshi Shibatani</i>	157
8. Two Ways to Travel: Verbs of Motion in English and Spanish <i>Dan I. Slobin</i>	195
9. Reasoning, Mappings, and Meta-metaphorical Conditionals <i>Eve Sweetser</i>	221
10. The Windowing of Attention in Language <i>Leonard Talmy</i>	235

11. The Case for 'Effector': Case Roles, Agents, and Agency Revisited	289
<i>Robert D. Van Valin, Jr. and David P. Wilkins</i>	
12. The Interpretation of Deverbal Nominals in Tepehua	323
<i>James K. Watters</i>	
Index	341

I

Inalienability and the Interpretation of Modified Noun Phrases

Claudia Brugman

INTRODUCTION

In his seminal work 'The Case for Case', Fillmore suggests that among the semantic distinctions which receive covert grammatical expression, in English and other languages, is the one between alienable and inalienable possession:

What is genuinely important about [1] is its paraphrasability as [4] (or [5]) and the fact that the construction exhibited by [1] is restricted to certain kinds of nouns. Note the ungrammaticality of [6].

1. I have a missing tooth.
2. I have a tooth.
3. I have a tooth and it is missing.
4. My tooth is missing.
5. One of my teeth is missing.
6. *I have a missing five-dollar bill.

Note that in sentences [1] and [4], three things are involved: (a) a possessor (an 'interested person', to use the traditional term), (b) a body part, and (c) an attribute—(a) *me*, (b) *tooth*, and (c) *missing* respectively—and that the sentences provide alternate ways of ascribing the attribute to the possessor's body

This paper was completed during a research fellowship funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowships for College and University Teachers Program. The endowment is herewith thanked for its support. Thanks also to Jeff Elman and Elizabeth Bates, directors of the Center for Research in Language, University of California, San Diego, for providing space, resources, and collegiality for that period. An early and brief mention of this phenomenon appears in Brugman (1988), completed under Professor Fillmore. Oral approximations to this paper were given at the 1989 meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, at the Purdue Linguistics Group, and at the UC San Diego Linguistics Department Colloquium. I thank the audiences at those meetings for their comments. Thanks to Michele Emanatian, Yuki Kuroda, George Lakoff, Catherine O'Connor, Matt Shibatani, and especially Farrell Ackerman for their comments.

part. They are two distinct superficial ways of expressing the same relationship among these three concepts. (Fillmore, 1968: 63)

Fillmore observes that sentence (1) does not entail (the usual reading of) sentence (2), nor is it equivalent in interpretation to sentence (3)—that the interesting relationship is not between the possessor and the body part, but between the body part and the 'attribute'. In a certain respect, it is that relationship which I will be exploring in this paper.

In placing the set of examples in (1–6) in a section headed 'The grammar of inalienable possession' (1968: 61), Fillmore implies that the difference in acceptability—on the intended reading—of (1) and (6) comes down to the fact that *tooth* denotes an inalienable possession and *five-dollar bill* denotes an alienable possession.

In the formalism by which he distinguishes sentences (1) and (6) and in the ensuing discussion, Fillmore suggests three things: first, that the relationship between the 'interested person' and his body part is the one expressed propositionally in sentences like (1), (4), and (5); second, that one may express this relation by using HAVE, as in (1), or by using the genitive marker, as in (4) and (5), but not both; and third, that HAVE and BE (at least in these constructions) are semantically bankrupt, since they are introduced by rule (Fillmore 1968: 64) rather than appearing in underlying structure.

In this paper I will explore alternatives to the first and third of these suggestions.¹ I will argue for the following points. First, the non-compositional reading of (1) which corresponds to (4) and (5) has nothing crucial to do with possession *per se* (though the semantics of inalienable possession does figure in, in an indirect way). Second, HAVE is only one among a class of predicators which allow a noncompositional reading of the modified NPs serving as their complements, but is sanctioned to fulfill this function on the basis of its semantics rather than by lexical stipulation—hence it cannot be semantically empty.²

¹ I do not dispute the claim that HAVE and the genitive are complementary in sentences which express a relation of possession or attribution between two individuals. There are acceptable interpretations of sentences like *He has his green eyes* (cf. (21) and (22)), but they seem not to express inalienable possession, even on the revised account I give below. Fillmore's general observation, that HAVE and the genitive marker do not co-occur in expressions of possession, seems indisputable.

² It would be disingenuous to evaluate by current standards the semantic implications of introducing HAVE and BE by rule, as Fillmore did in the 1968 model. These lexical insertions were part of a model in which semantic structures of a particular (rather abstract) sort constituted a large part of the underlying structure of a sentence. It might be more accurate to say that the implication of lexical insertion by rule in this model is