On the Edge of Acceptability: The Flemish External Possessor

In this paper we describe the methodology of a magnitude estimation norming test on a degraded regiolectal syntactic pattern. In Flemish, aside from standard nominal possession patterns, where the possessor and the possessee are part of a complex DP (1), one can, in certain varieties of the language, have the possessor external to the complex DP expressing possession (2). The goal of the norming test was to establish a) the geographical distribution of the syntactic pattern in question and b) how degraded the pattern is when compared to acceptable and unacceptable sentences. The methodology of magnitude estimation, combined with audio-fragments to stimulate the speakers' regiolectal syntax, allowed us to answer the above questions and gave us insight into the gradience of syntactic acceptability judgments.

DP-internal relations of possession in Flemish can be expressed with either a genitive-like possessor (1a), a postnominal prepositional possessor (1b) or a prenominal periphrastic possessor (1c).

(1) a. *Oma's fiets* — Pronominal *'s* Genitive
Gran's bicycle

b. *de fiets van Oma* — Postnominal *van*-PP
the bicycle of Gran

c. *Oma haar fiets* — PPPC (Hendriks (2010))
Gran her bicycle
'Gran's bicycle'

A fourth pattern of nominal possession in Flemish varieties contrasts to the above three variants in that it has the possessor-DP external to the complex DP expressing possession. The pattern is superficially similar to the PPPC but, significantly, can have an adjunct (*toen juste*) with clausal scope intervening between the possessor DP (*Oma*) and the possessee DP (*eure velo*) (2) (Haegeman & van Koppen (2011), Haegeman & Danckaert (2011a, 2011b); see also Deal (2011, 2013a, 2013b)).

(2) *'t Moest lukken dat [Oma] <u>toen juste</u> [eure velo] kapot was.*
it had.to happen that Gran then just her bicycle broken was
'It so happened that Gran's bicycle was broken just then.'

In addition to being the possessor of the lower DP, the higher DP is also affected by the event expressed in the lower part of the clause.

In the online magnitude estimation test we set up (using OnExp, University of Göttingen), we tested the hypotheses that a) the external possessor pattern is restricted to regiolectal West-Flemish and will not be accepted in Antwerp and that b) the external possessor pattern, even when accepted, is still degraded in comparison to the internal possessor patterns (1). For this we collected acceptability judgments comparing the external possessor pattern to the three internal possession patterns in both West-Flemish and Antwerp. In order to ensure that participants accessed their regiolectal register they were presented with the stimuli sentences as audio files, recorded in the relevant dialect. Magnitude estimation was chosen as questionnaire format to allow participants maximum range in gradience for their acceptability judgments.

The norming test showed that a) while the external possessor pattern was on average more accepted in West-Flanders than in Antwerp, there was still an unexpectedly high acceptance rate in Antwerp and that b) while on average the external possessor pattern is indeed degraded, there is an interesting pattern of gradience for the range of (non-)acceptability.

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