

Double nominative constructions via trope possession

While a canonical sentence of a language with nominative-accusative alignment has at most one nominative argument, some languages allow a sentence to have multiple nominative-marked arguments. Non-canonical markings are common across languages (Onishi 2001), but we focus on ‘double nominative constructions’ (DNC) in Korean such as (1), where the allomorphs of the nominative marker *i/ka* appear twice.

DNC is often assumed to be an underlyingly possessive construction, with the first, external nominal serving as the possessor of the second, internal nominal (Kim 2000; Kuno 1973). Alternatively, others argue that the external nominal is an argument of the clausal predicate that includes the internal nominal (Kim 2023; Shibatani and Pardeshi 2018).

In this paper, we present novel data from Korean involving DNC structures that cannot be analyzed in terms of nominal possession. Consider (2) and (3). It is not possible to represent these as underlyingly involving nominal possession, as the ungrammaticality of the genitive counterparts in (2) and (3) show.

Instead, we argue that these constructions represent a relation between the external nominal and the rest of the sentence, in line with the clausal predicate view. The clausal predicate view, however, does not provide a formal, compositional analysis in which the relation between the clausal predicate and the external nominal is constrained.

In order to provide a constrained, formal semantic analysis for these constructions, we analyze (2) and (3) in terms of possession of a trope (Moltmann, 2007). In particular, we argue that the predicate *kumcitoj* (‘prohibited’) and *eps* (‘not-exist’) are predicates of modal objects, namely, a prohibition and an absence, respectively as in (4). On this analysis, the internal nominal is the what is prohibited/absent, while the external nominal is the *bearer* of the trope, represented by the possessive relation π (5). This maintains a possessive analysis, but one where what is possessed is the trope argument rather than the internal nominal, as desired. This analysis combines the intuition from both the nominal possession analysis and the clausal predicate analysis but constrains the content of the clausal predicate to tropes.

What of sentences like those in (1), which suggest a possessive relationship between the external and internal nominals? One possibility is that Korean DNCs come in two types, one that involves nominal possession and the other that involves trope possession. Alternatively, we can maintain a uniform, trope-based analysis if we assume that the clausal expression is shifted to a reified, predicable object that the external nominal can possess, in line with Moltmann’s (2025) treatment of explicit property-referring terms. Evidence for this interpretation comes from a) the additive particle *to* that can be added to the external argument as in (6), where the speaker indicates that the speaker, too, possesses the property of ‘arms being long’ and ‘having a doctor as a mother’; and b) the ability to anaphorically pickup the said property with a demonstrative description *ku thukcing* (‘that characteristic’) as in (7).

(1) a. *Jin-i phal-i kil-ta*
 Jin-NOM arm-NOM long-DECL
 'Jin's arms are long.'

b. *John-i emeni-ka uysa-i-si-ta*
 John-NOM mother-NOM doctor-COP-HON-DECL
 'It is John whose mother is a doctor.'

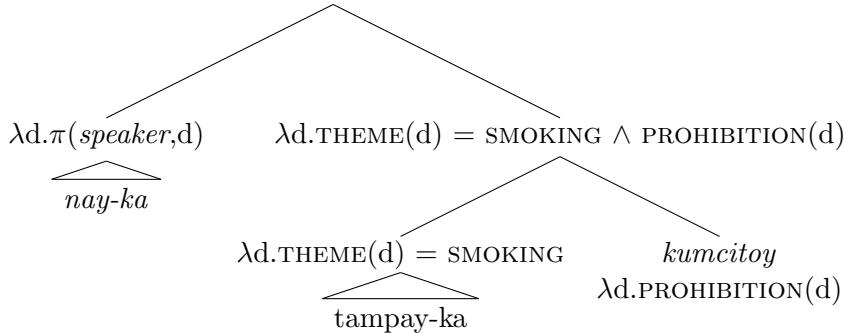
[Kim 2000]

(2) *nay-ka tampay-ka kumcitoys-ta* a. (**na-uy tampay-ka kumcitoys-ta*)
 I-NOM cigarett-NOM prohibited-DECL I-GEN cigarett-NOM prohibited-DECL
 'I'm not allowed to smoke.'

(3) *nay-ka chinkwu-ka eps-ta* a. (**na-uy chinkwu-ka eps-ta*)
 I-NOM friend-NOM not.exist-DECL I-GEN friend-NOM not.exist-DECL
 'I don't have friends.'

(4) *kumcitoys* $\rightsquigarrow \lambda d.\text{PROHIBITION}(d)$
eps $\rightsquigarrow \lambda d.\text{ABSENCE}(d)$

(5) $\lambda d.\pi(\text{speaker},d) \wedge \text{THEME}(d) = \text{SMOKING} \wedge \text{PROHIBITION}(d)$



(6) *Na-to { phal-i kil-ta / emeni-ka uysa-i-si-ta }*
 I-ADD arm-NOM long-DECL mother-NOM doctor-COP-HON-DECL
 'I also have long arms.' / 'I also have a doctor as a mother.'

(7) *Jin-i phal-i kil-ta. na-to ku thukcing-ul kacko-iss-ta*
 Jin-NOM arm-NOM long-DECL I-ADD that characteristic-ACC possess-exist-DECL
 (lit.) 'Jin's arms are long. I also have that property.'

Selected references:

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