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The Marking of Possession in Northern Pomo: Privative Opposition and Pragmatic Inference

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Pairs of lexemes like (a)-(d) below share the property that at some level of description the meaning of the second term is included in the meaning of the first term. In each case, the second term is more informative, more specific, or more limited in its extensional range. It has been observed that when such an opposition exists, the more general term can be understood in two ways: as signalling the general meaning of the entire category, or as signalling the contents of the category minus those contents that could be more directly signalled by the use of the second term (in other words, the complement set of the second term). It has been suggested for at least some such pairs that the two meanings of the more general term can be understood in terms of generalized quantity implicatures (Levinson 1987,1991; Reinhart 1983; Horn 1984, 1988; Huang 1991, O'Connor 1993; but cf. Richardson & Richardson 1990). If S uses the first term, H infers that use of the second (potentially more informative) term was avoided for some reason, and thus that S is conversationally implicating (indicated by +->) that the utterance meaning specifically precludes the special contribution made by the second term.

(a) < finger, thumb > "I bruised a finger." +-> NOT thumb cf. "I have ten fingers." (b) < some, all >"I ate some of the cookies." +-> NOT all cf. "At least some of them will go."

(c) < animal, human >"No animals allowed." +-> NOT human

(d) < him, himself > "John likes him " +-> NOT coreference cf. "Animals nurture their offspring." cf. "John saw it near him."

The interpretive complexities of privative oppositions in the grammar were of course explored by members of the Prague school and their students (Jakobson 1939, 1957; Waugh 1982), and were defined in terms of markedness. When two elements A and B are in a structural relationship such that A is a subset of B, and A carries a "mark", i.e. is specified for some feature [x], while B is unmarkedunspecified for feature [x]-- then use of the unmarked term B may be taken to signal either the entire set or only the complement set of A, that is, NOT [x]. Thus the lexeme dog denotes the set of canines without regard to sex; however when in opposition to the lexeme bitch it is taken to signal the meaning 'male canine'. Jakobson called the latter interpretation of dog the "minus-interpretation". In at least some cases, the minus-interpretation would be viewed by the neo-Griceans as a consequence of generalized quantity implicatures derived from the greater informativeness of the marked element.



"B" +-> NOT [x]
within context of opposition
Figure 1. Interpretation of privative opposition

Jakobson saw in the privative formulation a potential explanation for alternations of purely grammatical meaning, such as aspectual and case-marking oppositions. Both Jakobsonian and neo-Gricean accounts of the "minus interpretation" face two unanswered questions. One is a question about the general availability of this interpretation, given the privative structural configuration. Is it the case that a "minus interpretation" will be available for the unmarked member of any two lexemes or grammatical morphemes in a suitable opposition? If not, when does it become available? I will not deal with this question here, except to note that research on implicature and the grammar will inevitably confront it.

The second question concerns cases where a particular privative opposition does evidence two interpretations for its unmarked member, both the general interpretation (Jakobson's "zero-interpretation") and the minus interpretation. In these cases, what circumstances trigger the minus interpretation of B, the unmarked element? What circumstances result in the general interpretation of B? Clearly, the answer depends upon the mark that is carried by element A. Its contexts of use provide the frame within which the opposition will hold. In the disjoint reference analysis of Reinhart, Levinson and others, the opposition's activation and neutralization contexts are a central part of the argument: the pronoun "him" takes on the specific meaning of disjoint reference only when it is in an opposition with the element "himself." When the syntactic environment does not license use of the reflexive, the opposition is no longer active, and the disjoint reference implicature disappears: the hearer can no longer use the potential choice of the reflexive as a background against which to evaluate the speaker's choice of the regular pronoun. "Him" may either be construed as coreferent or disjoint in reference with a particular antecedent.

In many cases, these activation and neutralization frames are not easy to state. (For example, the specification of the oppositional context of a pronoun and anaphor pair may require statements about both syntax and discourse pragmatics, see e.g. O'Connor 1992, 1993). Jakobson saw the specification of the oppositional context as a complication in using this structural inference mechanism to explain grammatical phenomena. The same task is inherited by the neo-Griceans: in order to use this form of implicature to do grammatical work, the analyst must fully specify the context of opposition and its neutralization. This is one of the most interesting aspects of the neo-Gricean approach to grammatical oppositions: knowledge of language must include knowledge of when the opposition is available and when it is neutralized.

In this paper I will explore the framing question for privative oppositions within the context of a pair of grammatical constructions.³ Northern Pomo, a native language of Northern California, displays an alternation between two constructions that encode possession. These two constructions are in a privative opposition and evidence the kinds of interpretations discussed above. The nature of the opposition provides new data for consideration of the framing question.

I. Possessor Raising ~ Regular Possession alternation: basic facts

Example (1a) shows the normal means of marking possession in Northern Pomo, irrespective of what is possessed. The possessor, marked in the oblique case, is to the left within the NP (marked with brackets). The possessor and the possessed object form one (obligatorily) contiguous noun phrase. Examples (1b) and (1c) display an opposition that is licensed just in case the possessed object is a body part. (1b) is the regular form of possession, and (1c) is an instance of possessor raising, where the possessor and the body part become separate constituents, demonstrably independent of each other. The possessor is no longer marked with the Oblique case, instead appearing in the case that marks direct objects and some subjects (O'Connor 1992). In O'Connor (to appear) I have described this alternation in detail. Space constraints do not permit discussion of the syntax and morphology of PR beyond the statement that in its syntactic behavior it is similar to possessor raising constructions found in other languages (Aissen 1979, Davies 1981, Baker 1988).

- (1a) REGULAR POSSESSION me:di [moiw-a? kamiisa -nam] phaley-ka 3sm-Obl shirt -spec burn-caus "Mary burned his shirt."
- (1b) REGULAR POSSESSION me:di [morw-a? yasis -nam] phaley-ka
 (BODY PART) Mary. A 3sm-Obl knee -spec burn-caus
 "Mary burned his knee."
- (1c) Possessor Raising [yasis -nam] me:di [morw-al] phaley-ka (BODY PART ONLY) knee -spec Mary. A 3sm.-P burn-caus "Mary burned his knee."

In this Possessor Raising construction, body part and possessor are both accessible to focus, modification and specification. In (2a) the scopal adverb "only" picks out the possessor to be in focus, and in (2b), it picks out the body part.

- [morw-al] ye? [yasis] dalam-?a 3sm-P only knee cover -pass "He's the only one whose knees they covered."
- (2b) Possessor Raising [yasis] ye? [morw-al] dalam-?a knee only 3sm-P cover -pass "It was only his knees they covered."

II. The Possessor Raising ~ Regular Possession alternation: contributions to utterance interpretation

What are the interpretive consequences of using one or the other form? Truth conditionally, the regular possession construction and the Possessor Raising construction are equivalent, but the PR construction does add another sort of interpretive signficance to the utterance. In (3a) below, the speaker asserts that the addressee's hair looks nice. (3b) also asserts that the addressee's hair looks nice, but it further adds emphasis to the significance of that fact for the possessor. The attractiveness of her hair propagates to her whole countenance, whereas in (3a), it is specifically a compliment about the hair itself. (Comments in square brackets below the translation were spontaneously provided by the consultant during elicitation and text translation sessions.)

(3a) REGULAR POSSESSION

[mi? ?e:-nam] k'edi phit'a
2s.Obl hair-spec good appear

"Your hair looks nice."

["That would mean that its color, or
something about the hair was pretty."]

(3b) Possessor Raising [mito] [7et] k'edi phit'a you.P hair good appear

"You look nice with that hairstyle."

["That would mean it LOOKED pretty ON her, not particularly the color or anything, just that she looked nice."]

Similarly, (4a) and (4b) both assert that the subject hit the dog's eye with a rock, but (4b) also conveys that the possessor of the eye was particularly affected by this event.

- (4a) REGULAR POSSESSION [hayu yaču? ?uy-nam] morw xabe wih baneh dog Obl eye-spec 3sm.A rock inst. hit

 "He hit the dog's eye with a rock."
- (4b) Possessor Raising [hayu yačul] mo:w xabe wih [?uy] baneh dog P 3sm.A rock inst. eye hit

 "He hit the dog's eye with a rock."

 ["That means the eye might be destroyed"]

The use of the Possessor Raising construction appears to contribute a special focus on the consequences for the possessor of the state of affairs that the predicate-body part combination describes. What is the nature of these consequences? With some verb-body part combinations, a first approach might be to draw those consequences from the entailments concerning the possessor. In (5a) and (5b) it appears that the consequences for the possessor may stem from the entailment that if she cuts his foot, she cuts him.

(5a) REGULAR POSSESSION man [morw-a? xama: -nam] čaxa
3sf.A 3sm-Obl foot-spec cut

"She cut his foot." (Entailment: "She cut him.")

(5b) Possessor Raising man [morw-al] [xamar] čaxa
3sf.A 3sm.-P foot-spec cut
"She cut his foot."

But in (6), there is no analogously useful entailment associated with the regular possession version of the utterance (not given here). It's not entailed that she is thin, for example. However, there are consequences to what the predication describes in (6): she may look weak, she may not be able to run very far, she may look attractive, she may look unattractive. The interpretation of the salient consequences depend upon the hearer's culturally situated interpretation of the scene that the utterance invokes.

(6) Possessor Raising bic'u-c'ay [ma:d-al] [yai] na small-pl 3sf-P leg cop "Her legs are small/thin."

In (7), a similar point can be made. Here the speaker is talking to the addressee about a terrible accident the addressee had recently had, in which she was hit by a pick-up truck and the back of her hand was almost ripped off. The speaker says "So your skin was just hanging there." The entailment that 'some body part was hanging there' is not particularly informative, but the utterance itself points to numerous consequences that any person could adduce for such a possessor: pain, feelings of fear, vulnerability, disgust, etc.

(7) Possessor Raising nan [siyan-nam] [mito] phidima-n and skin-spec 2s.P hang-prog "So your skin was just hanging there."

In each of these cases, the speaker's choice of the Possessor Raising construction has in some sense signalled an intention to communicate that the hearer should search for some significant consequences--significant for the possessor--of the circumstances described by the predicate, and add them into the ongoing representation of the discourse. This focus on the consequences has the status of a conventional implicature attached to the PR construction itself. Its interpretive import is not calculable nor cancellable and might be informally stated as follows.

(8) MEANING CONVEYED BY USE OF PR CONSTRUCTION

Consider the scene that is created or activated by this utterance: a scene in which a possessor and one of its body parts are the target of some predication. Consider the compositional total of the linguistic meanings, and query that scene for the range of consequences of those circumstances for the body part possessor. The consequences in question may be social, physiological, psychological, functional, etc. Find one or more such consequences that S would be likely to want you to be aware of, and let that further structure your understanding of the scene.

Frame semantics (Fillmore 1982) provides a natural perspective for thinking about the interpretive processes that this construction requires. Lexical items evoke complex scenes carrying both an array of specific knowledge not mentioned in the utterance, and often a perspective on that scene.

(9) "The interpreter's envisionment of the text world assigns that world both a perspective and a history. A report of somebody <u>buying</u> something evokes the frame of the commercial event, but sees that event, for the moment at least, from the point of view of one of its participants. Describing somebody as being ON LAND locates the scene in the history of a sea voyage, by noticing that it is relevant to describe the location in this way only if this period is seen as an interruption of a period of sea travel."

(Fillmore 1982. p. 122)

So in these cases, by choosing to use the PR construction, the speaker is giving the hearer a perspective from which to envision the text world. The hearer is instructed to envision the text world in such a way that the consequences for the body part possessor are foregrounded over the consequences for the body part itself. (See O'Connor (to appear) for a fuller discussion of the semantic and pragmatic processes involved in the interpretation of this construction.)

I have claimed that the PR construction has attached to it a conventional implicature directing the hearer to search for contextually salient consequences of the situation for the body part possessor. To return to the formulation given at the beginning of the paper, the intention to highlight the consequences, i.e. the conventional implicature itself, is the "mark", the [x], associated with the PR construction. The regular possession construction is neutral or unspecified with respect to the mark: when the regular possession construction is used, there may or may not be any intention to highlight consequences for the possessor.

Given the Jakobsonian and neo-Gricean formulations discussed above, we might predict that use of the unmarked construction (in this case, the regular possession construction), would trigger a Q-implicature that the speaker was avoiding the use of the PR construction, and thus, that the "mark" (the search for consequences for the possessor) are somehow being denied. This is Jakobson's "minus-interpretation", derived by the neo-Griceans from a Q-implicature. The next examples demonstrate this phenomenon. Example (10) involves a complex set of cultural and interpersonal consequences of body part possession. What is most important for current purposes, however, is that the speaker achieves her communicative aims by avoiding the use of the PR construction.

(10) REGULAR POSSESSION [kawi -yaču? ?uy] c'axat'? -ay na child-Obl eye blue -pl cop

"The kid's eyes are blue..."

["The kid's eyes may be blue, but she is Indian"]

The speaker, a Pomo Indian, took her great-granddaughter to the supermarket. The child has blue eyes and light hair. The speaker encountered another Pomo woman who made a somewhat snide remark about the girl's phenotype. The speaker

countered by saying "the kid's eyes are blue" using the regular possession form. The linguistic meaning of the sentence is that the child has the property of having blue eyes. If the speaker had used the Possessor Raising construction, she would have been on record as wanting the hearer to consider the consequences for her great-granddaughter of having blue eyes, at least one of which vulnerability to inferences about ethnic heritage. In this case, in avoiding the PR construction, she set up another kind of implicature: she conveys that she avoided the PR expression, and that the hearer should explicitly not draw any conclusions from the evidence of the girl's blue eyes about her ethnic heritage.

(11a) and (11b) give a similar pair. When the PR construction is used, as in (11a), the speaker is intending that the consequences of having ugly feet—global unattractiveness, say—are part of the conveyed message about the subject. On the other hand, use of the Regular Possession construction Q-implicates that the speaker avoided the PR construction. This conversational implicature then results in the hearer's subsequent context-specific inference that the speaker intends to convey something positive about the possessor in (11b), since the consequences highlighted in the PR version are implicitly denied.

```
(11a) Possessor Raising
                             [ morw-al ]
                                               [ xama -nam ]
                                                                   tiyiš
                                 3sm-P
                                                  foot -spec
                                                                   ugly copula
                                 "His feet are ugly."
                                 ["He looks bad."]
(11b) REGULAR POSSESSION
                             [ morw-a?
                                            xama -nam ]
                                                             tiyiš
                                                                     na
                                 3sm-Obl
                                              foot -spec
                                                              ugly copula
                                 "His feet are ugly."
                                 ["Well, his feet may be ugly, but the
                                  rest of him looks pretty good"]
```

In summary, in each of these examples, it is clear how the minus interpretation arises. Utterances employing the Possessor Raising construction are more informative than utterances that employ the regular possession construction. At the level of linguistic meaning they assert the same thing. But at the level of conventional pragmatics, the PR construction adds something extra: a direction to the hearer to actively find and take up some real-world consequence of the basic compositional meaning. The neutral term in this privative opposition of constructions thus receives—at least in these cases—a minus interpretation. In neo-Gricean terms, it triggers a Q-implicature that for some reason the PR construction has been avoided and thus does not apply.

We might expect this Q-implicature to be triggered each time the speaker uses the regular possession construction. However, in fact, use of the regular possession construction does not always trigger the minus interpretation. In the next examples, use of the regular possession construction doesn't seem to signal much of anything. For that matter, neither does the use of the PR construction itself.

- (12a) Possessor Raising [xamabusa] [morwal] šit'ay-miti big.toe 3sm.P crooked-lie "His big toe is crooked."
- (12b) REGULAR POSSESSION [moiwa? xamabuisa-nam] šit'ay-miti 3sm.Obl big.toe -spec crooked-lie "His big toe is crooked."

Despite the fact that the minus interpretation is seemingly absent in (12), it is still the case that the PR construction is both syntactically marked and more informative (via its conventional implicature) than the regular possession construction, so the basis for the privative opposition still holds. Thus current accounts of generalized conversational implicature in the grammar (see especially Levinson 1991 and Huang 1991 regarding Q- and M-implicatures) would likely predict that the implicature patterns should be fairly stable.

To figure out why the implicature "Speaker is avoiding A" is cancelled here (or alternatively, why the opposition is neutralized), we must consider the frame: the conditions that favor or require the use of the marked member, the PR construction. This is basic to the logic of such oppositions: when the speaker uses B, and the hearer infers the minus interpretation ("Not A"), the hearer must assume that the speaker <u>could</u> have used or <u>should</u> have used A. Otherwise the implicature of avoidance will not be warranted.

III. Frames that activate the opposition

There are two sources of evidence regarding the availability of the privative opposition. The first is obviously the availability of the minus reading itself, or the Q-implicatures described above. The second is the speakers' preference for or avoidance of one or the other alternant. Contexts in which the speaker prefers to use the PR construction constitute the frame in which the opposition is active and available. In environments that do not require or favor the PR construction, the implicature should tend to disappear. What are these contexts?

Examples (13a-d) indicate that there is a strong preference to use the Possessor Raising construction when the possessor is human, and particularly when the possessor is well-known to the speaker. (Form choices displayed below are those offered first upon elicitation and those found in texts. Examples marked # are dispreferred or rejected by the speaker.)

- (13a) Possessor Raising [?aimi-de: -1] [?uy-nam] morw xabe wih baneh my-older.sis-P eye-spec 3sm.A rock inst. hit

 "He hit my older sister's eye with a rock."
- (13b) Possessor Raising

 [kawiya ba-nam mo:w-al] [?uy-nam] mo:w xabe wih baneh child boy -spec 3sm-P eye-spec 3sm.A rock inst. hit

 "He hit the boy's eye with a rock."

(13c) REGULAR POSSESSION

[kawiya ba-nam morw-a? ?uy-nam] morw xabe wih baneh child boy -spec 3sm.-Obl eye-spec 3sm.A rock inst. hit "He hit the boy's eye with a rock."

(13d) REGULAR POSSESSION [hayu yaču? ?uy-nam] mo:w xabe wih baneh eye-spec 3sm.A rock inst. hit

"He hit the dog's eye with a rock."

There is also a detectable preference for using the PR construction when the circumstances described have a significant impact on the possessor. Thus in (14), where the speaker is feeling pain in a sensitive body part, the regular possession construction is rejected.

(14a) Possessor Raising [to: 1 [7uy] dithal-e 1s.P eye hurt-pres "My eye hurts."

(14b) REGULAR POSSESSION #[khe ?uy-nam] dithal-e 1s.Obl eye-spec hurt-pres "My eye hurts."

These examples contrast with (15), in which a first person possessor and the same sensitive body part does <u>not</u> disfavor use of the regular possession construction, due to a low-impact predicate.

(15a) Possessor Raising [tot] [?uy-nam] šikišiki-m-a ls.P eye -spec twitch-asp -pres "My eye is twitching."

(15b) REGULAR POSSESSION [khe ?uy -nam] šikišiki-m-a 1s.Obl eye -spec twitch-asp-pres "My eye is twitching."

And the next examples demonstrate that there is even a contribution made by the nature of the body part. The more significant body parts, like the face, seem to call for use of the PR construction, even with low-impact predicates, whereas the knee or the fingernails, for example, do not.

(16a) Possessor Raising [maid-al] [?uymo] mina c'amo: čima 3sf-P face upon fly sit
"A fly is sitting on her face."

(16b) REGULAR POSSESSION #[maid-a? ?uymo -nam] mina c'amo čima 3sf-Obl face -spec upon fly sit "A fly is sitting on her face."

(16c)	Possessor Raising	[maid-al] [yaisis] minai c'amoi čima 3sf-P knee upon fly sit
		"A fly is sitting on her knee."
(16d)	REGULAR POSSESSION	[maɪd-aʔ yaɪsis-nam] mina c'amo čima 3sf-Obl knee-spec upon fly sit
		"A fly is sitting on her knee."
(17a)	Possessor Raising	ba-de: [maid-al] [?uymo] datoy 3's-oldr.sis.A 3sf-P face design
		"[Her older sister]k painted her; face."
(17b)	REGULAR POSSESSION	# ba- de: [maida? ?uymo-nam] datoy 3's- oldr.sis.A 3sf-Obl face -spec design
		"[Her older sister] _k painted herj face."
(17c)	Possessor Raising	ba-de: [ma:d-al] [thana-heč mul] datoy 3's-oldr.sis.A 3sf-P fingernails dem design
		"[Her older sister]k painted herj fingernails."
(17d)	REGULAR POSSESSION	ba- de: [maid-a? thana-heč mul] datoy 3's- o.sis.A 3sf-Obl fingernails dem design "[Her older sister] _k painted her; fingernails."

Although a statement regarding the animacy of the possessor is required to make some of these generalizations, the generalizations themselves do not seem to be typical of grammaticized animacy hierarchy effects. Rather, choice of possession construction seems to be computed anew for each particular utterance, depending upon the particular combination of body part, possessor, and predicate. The speaker appears to be considering the entire scene of possession, integrated with the scene contributed by the verb. Thus the frame which activates the opposition between the regular possession construction and the PR construction is complex, and is rooted in speakers' understandings of the scenes evoked by particular lexical elements.

The next examples show that if we understand the pattern of usage preferences that form the background to the speaker's intentions and hearer's interpretations, we can understand the source of the range of implicatures we see. Given the preferences just described, (18a) is not surprising. The possessor is human, the body part is highly innervated and functionally important, and burning is something that has a significant impact on the possessor of the body part. So we expect the speaker to choose to describe those circumstances using the Possessor Raising construction, which functions as a sort of index that those drastic consequences are being registered by the speaker. (18a) is thus the default choice. If the speaker uses the regular possession form, as in (18b), an apparently robust implicature is formed that the arm must already be detached.

- (18a) Possessor Raising [sar -nam] [morw-al] man phaley -ka arm -spec 3sm-P 3sf.A burn -caus "She burned his arm."
- (18b) REGULAR POSSESSION [morw-a? šai -nam] man phaley -ka
 3sm-Obl arm -spec 3sf.A burn -caus
 "She burned his arm."
 ["Sounds like his arm is detached."]

In (18b), upon hearing this disastrous circumstance cast within the regular possession construction, the hearer searches for some particular envisionment of the scene that would preclude any consequences for the possessor. One possible explanation is that the arm is detached from its possessor, thus the possessor does not suffer any consequences of the current action. Example (19) reflects this interpretive path in use within a traditional narrative text. Bear Woman has killed her daughter-in-law, and has plucked out the daughter-in-law's eyeballs. She is going to roast them and eat them, but first she puts them on top of a pile of clover that her daughter-in-law had picked. The speaker uses the regular possession construction here, and reports that the PR construction would be inappropriate.

(19) REGULAR POSSESSION
SO-nam mil mina [ma-?od-a? ?uy-xabe -nay] mul mičam-he clover-spec. dem.Obl on LDR's-D.in.law-Obl eye-stone -spec. dem put-adv "[Bear woman]...having put her daughter-in-law's eyeballs on top of the clover.."

The next examples illustrate further the complexities of the frame that activates the opposition. It seems that the speaker and hearer take into account not just the contents of the possession scene, but the stance of the speaker with respect to the possessor. Not surprisingly, considering its content, this construction has picked up a significance within normal conversational politeness conventions. For third person reference as well as direct address (e.g. "Did your feet get cold?"), part of the preference for the Possessor Raising construction when the possessor is human can be attributed to a cultural convention of honoring the positive face needs of other humans (Brown and Levinson 1987). If someone's body parts are having something done to them, it is likely that there will be salient consequences, simply due to human anatomy and nervous system, and human interactional symbolic life. As a member of this culture, it may be that one is required to indicate regard for other people's experiences by using the construction that acknowledges those experiential consequences.⁴

In (20), the speaker is telling someone that a particular person is not dancing because his foot hurts. She uses the regular possession construction to mark this. However, politeness norms of the type just described would favor use of the Possessor Raising construction. So what does the hearer make of the speaker's avoidance of this norm? She infers that the speaker is implicating either disrespect for the possessor, or that the possessor's foot pain is minimal. Either way, the final inference is that the speaker is belittling the third person subject for not dancing due to his aching foot.

(20) REGULAR POSSESSION

[ti-7 xama-nam] dithal - kan morw khemane -nha LDA-Obl foot -spec hurt - Acomp 3sm.A dance -NEG

"He's not dancing because his foot hurts."
["Sounds like you're belittling him."]

What about the cases where either the possessor is not human, or the predicate is so minimally significant to the human possessor that the PR construction does not seem to be preferred? As anticipated, use of the regular possession construction in these cases does <u>not</u> implicate the negation of what the PR construction implies. There is no minus interpretation available for the regular possession construction. Instead, use of the PR construction itself contributes a special significance to the utterance. In (21a), use of the regular possession construction to convey that the cat's eyes are blue does not suggest anything out of the ordinary. Use of the PR construction, however, carries with it an implication that the cat somehow has a special status, and is being talked about as though it were more than a mere animal.

- (21a) REGULAR POSSESSION [xadalom -nam yaču? ?uy] c'axat'? -ay na cat -spec Obl eye blue -pl cop "The cat's eyes are blue."
- (21b) Possessor Raising [xadalom nam yačul] [?uy] c'axat'? -ay na cat -spec P eye blue -pl cop
 "The cat's eyes are blue."
 [The cat has a special status]

Example (22) and (23) provide further evidence of the context-dependent nature of both the possibility for implicature and its eventual contents. In (22), the speaker is telling about a relative getting shot at by a police officer. She uses the Possessor Raising construction, but there is no implication that his hand was particularly badly damaged. On the other hand, in (23), when the possessor is a dog, we have the implicature--against the background that this construction is <u>not</u> the default choice in this communicative setting--that the dog must really have been affected.

(22) Possessor Raising

nan nan [morw-al] [thana] kay morw-al chok-na -n -way khap-nam morw and and 3sm.-P hand also 3sm-P shoot-cop.-adv.d.m. cop-spec 3sm.A

"And and ...in the hand, too, he shot him, the cop."
[Neither implicates or precludes that hand was destroyed]

(23) Possessor Raising

[hayu yačul] [?uy-nam] morw xabe wih baneh dog Obl eye-spec 3sm.A rock inst. hit

"He hit the dog's eye with a rock."
[Implicates that eye was destroyed]

In a context of utterance like this where there is no strong preference for the PR

construction, the PR construction itself becomes noticeable, triggering implicatures that the speaker must be particularly concerned with the consequences of the predication situation for the possessor. But where the contextual frame has activated the opposition, the speaker can achieve subtle conversational effects through avoidance of the PR construction, as in (3) (repeated here as (24)). Here the ordinary expression of the proposition "your hair looks nice" would call for the Possessor Raising construction due to politeness. Such a remark is personal and positive, but does not necessarily indicate raving enthusiasm about the appearance of the addressee. Against this background, however, use of the regular possession construction imbues the compliment with a distinct faintness.

(24a) Possessor Raising [mito] [?e:] k'edi phit'a you.P hair good appear

"Your hair looks nice/You look nice with that hairstyle." ["That would mean ... just that she looked nice."]

(24b) REGULAR POSSESSION mi-? ?ei-nam] k'edi phit'a 2s-Obl hair-spec good appear

"Your hair looks nice."

["How do I look?" "Well, dear, your hair looks nice..."]

In (17c-d) above, on the other hand ("Her older sister painted her fingernails"), the opposition seems to dissolve altogether. In those cases, the opposition between Possessor Raising and regular possession no longer carries the same communicative significance, and the use of the regular possession construction goes unremarked. In just these cases we have no obvious tropic factors favoring one construction over the other. (It is, however, likely that there are subtle communicative consequences which are beyond the resolution power of these relatively crude methods of linguistic elicitation and examination of texts.)

IV. Conclusion

Examination of a pair of clausal constructions in privative opposition highlights several facts of potential interest. In this case the privative opposition is grounded in the syntactic, semantic and conventional pragmatic dimensions of the constructions. The grounds for saying that the opposition is privative hold for all examples here. Yet the availability of the minus interpretation for the regular possession construction, the implicature that "speaker is avoiding A", must be calculated for each utterance occasion. In other words, the frame that will determine whether this privative opposition is active includes both the circumstances being described and the current context of utterance.5

In general, linguistic objects in the marked pole of a privative opposition will have characteristic sorts of conditions on their preferred environments of use. Their social history as expressions, as it were, will form the background or frame for any inferences that hearers will draw. Grammatical morphemes will differ from lexemes, and from clausal constructions, in their characteristic framing conditions. Nevertheless, when implicature is brought to bear as an explanatory device at any level of grammatical analysis, a heterogenous and rich set of conditioning factors will likely require our consideration.

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In Jakobson's words: "...one of two mutually opposite grammatical categories is "marked" while the other is "unmarked". The general meaning of a marked category states the presence of a certain (whether positive or negative) property A; the general meaning of the corresponding unmarked category states nothing about the presence of A, and is used chiefly, but not exclusively, to indicate the absence of A. The unmarked term is always the negative of the marked term, but on the level of general meaning the opposition of the two contradictories may be interpreted as "statements of A" vs. "no statement of A", whereas on the level of "narrowed", nuclear meanings, we encounter the opposition "statement of A" vs. "statement of non-A." (Jakobson 1957, p. 136).

Waugh (1982) explains the notion in the following way: "...in paired grammatical categories there exists the same type of asymmetry between correlated elements, with one of the elements conceived of as endowed with a mark and the other conceived of as nonendowed with that same mark...the marked term necessarily conveys a more narrowly specified and delimited conceptual item than the unmarked. As a consequence, the marked element signals a certain grammatical concept that the unmarked leaves unsignaled....[e.g.] in most European languages (e.g., English), with the grammatical distinction past tense ~ present tense, the marked past tense specifies 'past time' [footnote omitted] (time that is past with respect to the speech situation); the unmarked present tense specifies neither 'past time' nor 'present time', nor does it deny 'past time', if we take into account the full range of its usage... two and two are four, I teach at Cornell University....the opposition is between the presence of x [the mark] and the nonnecessary presence (presence or absence or even nonpertinence) of x'' (Waugh 1982, p. 301). 2 Horn, in a wonderfully varied survey of lexical and sentence semantic privative

oppositions (1984) suggests that this cannot be the case.

³ For a discussion of "grammatical construction" see Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor 1988. For current purposes the term "construction" may be understood according to the usage suggested in traditional grammars: a structure that may have idiosyncratic syntactic, semantic and pragmatic properties. For a discussion of the grammatical status of this particular construction in Northern Pomo, see O'Connor 1992 and to appear.

4 This suggestion is in accord with other politeness phenomena observed in association with other grammatical subsystems of Northern Pomo, particularly case-marking and long-distance reflexives. See O'Connor 1992 for further

It also includes syntactic factors associated with constraints on the PR construction. As has been observed for other languages with PR, only possessors found within absolutive arguments (roughly, subjects of intransitives and objects of transitives) can be 'raised'. Thus the privative opposition is available only in certain syntactic environments.

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