

## Possession, Location, and Existence

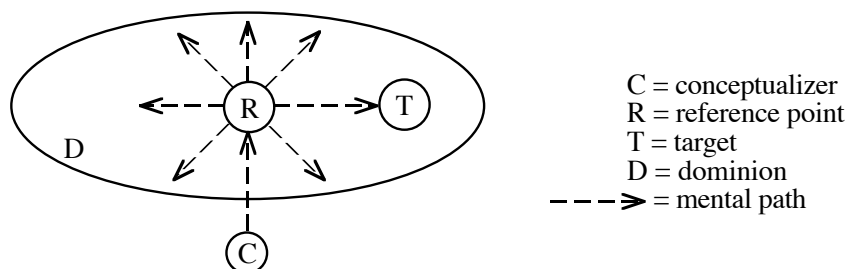
- A. What is “Possession”?
- B. Possessive Grounding
- C. Nominal and Clausal Possession
- D. BE Possessives
- E. Diachronic Perspective

- (1)(a) What is the *semantic value* of possessive elements and possessive constructions?
- (b) How does nominal possession serve a *grounding* function?
- (c) What is the relationship between *nominal* and *clausal* possession?
- (d) What is the relationship between the different kinds *clausal possessive constructions*?
- (e) How do clausal possessive predicates *grammaticize* from their lexical sources?
- (f) What is the relationship among *possession*, *location*, and *existence*?

### A. What is “Possession”?

- (2) “... *A has B* expresses that there is some state relation between ‘A’ and ‘B’ and ... leaves a more precise specification of this relation to the context” (Bendix 1966: 120).
- (3)(a) *the mayor’s cellphone; Sam’s mother; my elbow; the supervisor’s desk; your rook; the baby’s crib; his problems; Ellen’s candidate; our train; the student’s qualifications; her migraine; the dog’s fleas; their exasperation; the bank’s current interest rate; Oswald’s assassination [of Kennedy]; Kennedy’s assassination [by Oswald]*
- (b) *\*the cellphone’s mayor; \*the fleas’ dog; \*the current interest rate’s bank; \*the assassination’s Kennedy*
- (4) Certain fundamental and universal grammatical notions—among them noun, verb, subject, object, and possessive—can be characterized semantically at both the **prototype** level and the **schema** level. The prototype is based on an experientially grounded *conceptual archetype*. The schematic characterization (claimed to be valid for all instances) invokes a basic *cognitive ability* which is **immanent** in the archetype (i.e. “lies within it”). First manifested in the archetype, this cognitive ability is later extended to other cases.
- (5)(a) *Prototypical* values of possessives include **ownership**, **kinship**, and **whole-part relationships**.
- (b) At the most schematic level, the *possessor* can be characterized as a **reference point**, and the *possessed* as a **target** accessible via that reference point.

(6)



(7)(a) Other reference point relationships: *topic* (R) and *comment clause* (T); *antecedent* (R) and *pronoun* (T); *trajector/landmark* (R) and *profiled relationship* (T).

(b) When a verb is nominalized, the profiled relationship is conceptually reified to form an abstract thing. The relation which the trajector or landmark bears to it is then a reference point relationship between two things, hence an instance of possession (*Oswald's assassination*; *Kennedy's assassination*).

(8) Natural paths of mental access:

(a) reference individual ("ego") ----> kin [e.g. *Sherridan's grandfather*]

(b) whole ----> part [e.g. *the lion's mane*]

(c) owner ----> possession [e.g. *Jason's wallet*]

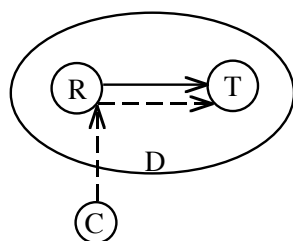
(9)(a) In prototypical possessives, R **controls** T in some manner (physically, socially, and/or experientially), implying that R has an *exclusive privilege of access* to T.

(b) R's control of T is **onstage** and **objectively construed** (an *object* of conception). C's mental access to T is **offstage** and **subjectively construed** (inhering in the *subject* of conception).

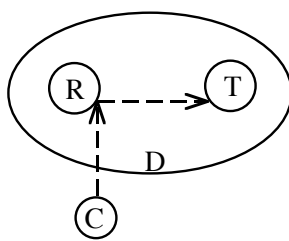
(c) C follows a mental path from R to T (invokes them sequentially) in the conceptualization of R controlling T. The subjective mental path is **immanent** in C's conception of the objective relationship.

(10)

(a) Possessive Prototype



(b) Possessive Schema



————> = access/control by R (physical, social, experiential)

-----> = mental access by C

(11) *his age; the dog's enormous size; the applicant's nationality; the table's rough surface; my critics; the door's hinges; their situation; Lincoln's assassination; our very existence; the car's present location; her complexion; the year's most tragic event; the moon's average surface temperature*

(12) **Subjectification**: An *objectively* construed relationship fades away, leaving behind a *subjectively* construed relationship that was *immanent* in it (inherent in its conception).

## B. Possessive Grounding

(13)(a) Nominal possessives (e.g. *Sally's friend* or *my new car*) function as **grounding elements**.

(b) The **ground** (G) comprises the speaker (S), the hearer (H), and their interaction. In their offstage role as conceptualizers of an expression's meaning, the interlocutors are tacit and subjectively construed.

(c) **Grounding** is the grammaticized means by which S and H coordinate their mental reference to things and events in a discourse.

(14)(a) A nominal expression profiles a **thing** (defined abstractly). A verb or clause profiles a **process** (a relationship whose evolution through time is foregrounded).

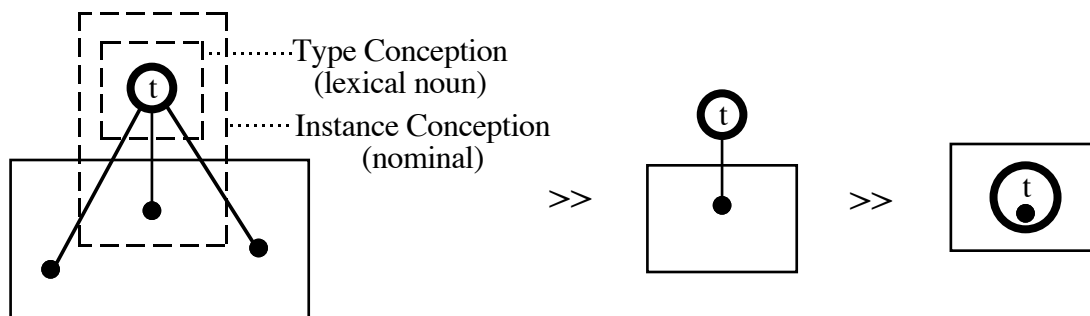
(b) By itself, a *lexical noun* or *verb* merely specifies a **type** of thing or process. A full *nominal* (noun phrase) or *finite clause* designates a **grounded instance** of a thing or process type.

(c) Nominal grounding elements include determiners and possessives. Clausal grounding elements include tense and certain kinds of modality.

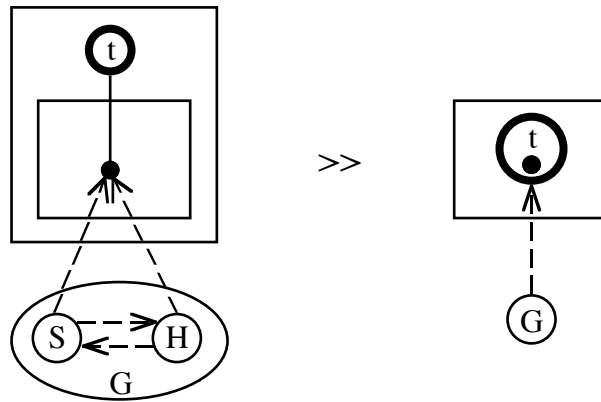
(15)(a) A **type conception** represents the abstracted commonality of instances. It is *schematic* relative to instance conceptions, and *immanent* in them.

(b) An **instance** is specifically thought of as occupying a particular location (at a given moment), which distinguishes it from other instances.

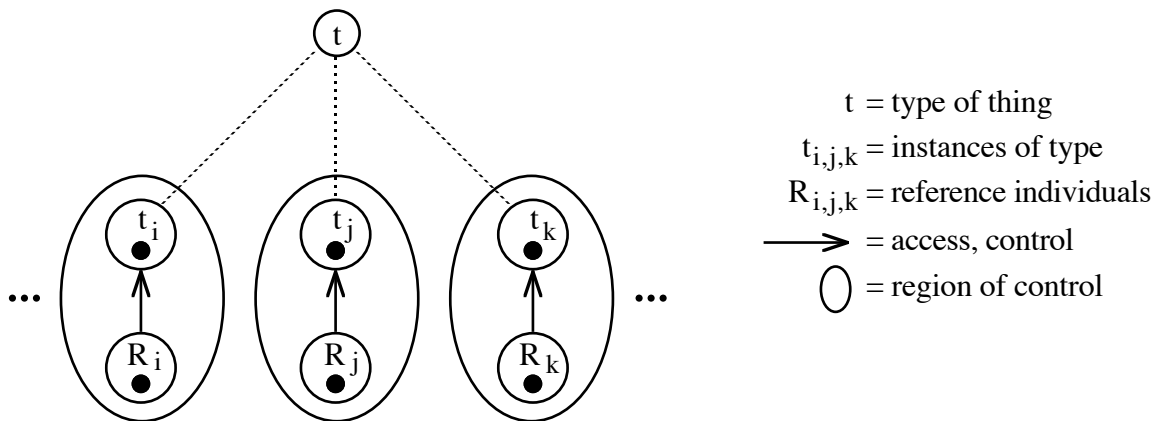
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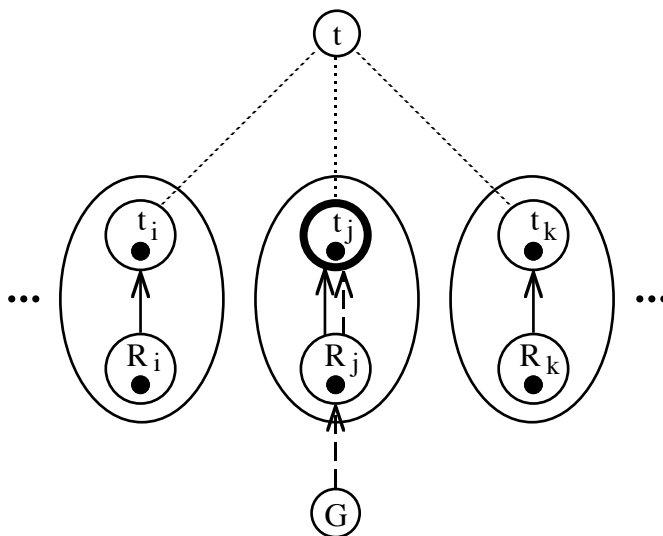
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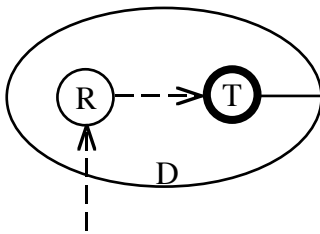


## C. Nominal and Clausal Possession

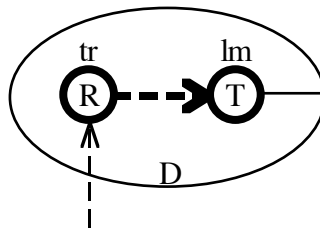
- (20)(a) An expression's **profile** (shown in bold) is the entity rendered salient in the sense of being *designated* (*referred to*).
- (b) In a profiled *relationship*, the **trajector** (tr) and the **landmark** (lm) are the participants accorded *primary* and *secondary* degrees of *focal prominence*.
- (c) A **subject** (or **object**) is a nominal expression which specifies the *trajector* (or the *landmark*) of a profiled relationship.

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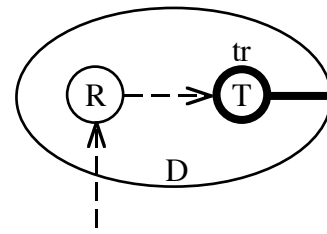
(a) Nominal Possession



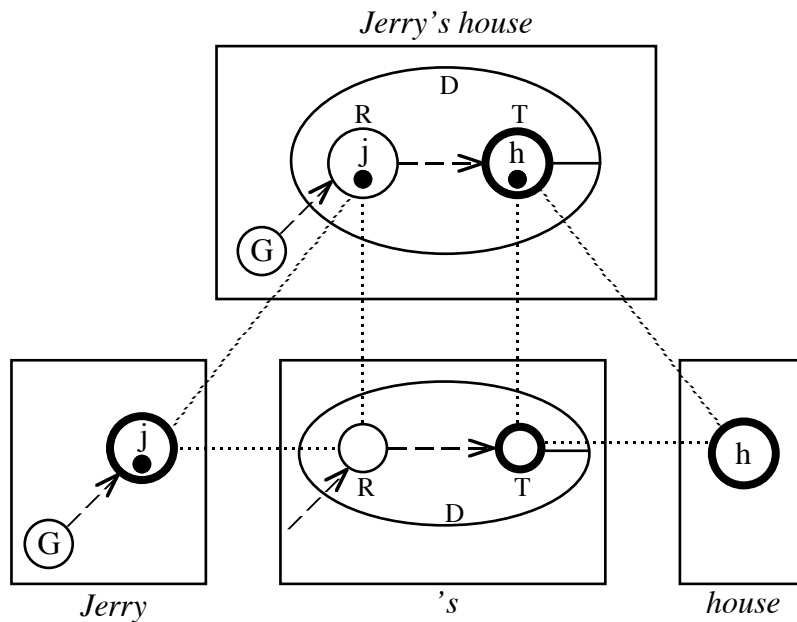
(b) HAVE Possession



(c) BE Possession

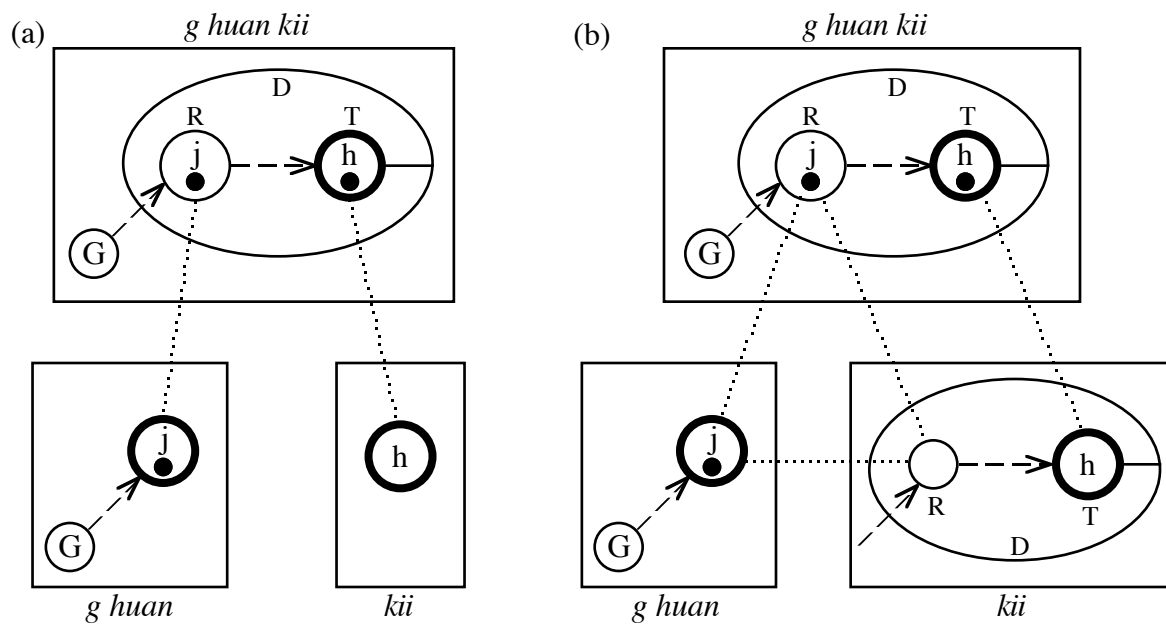


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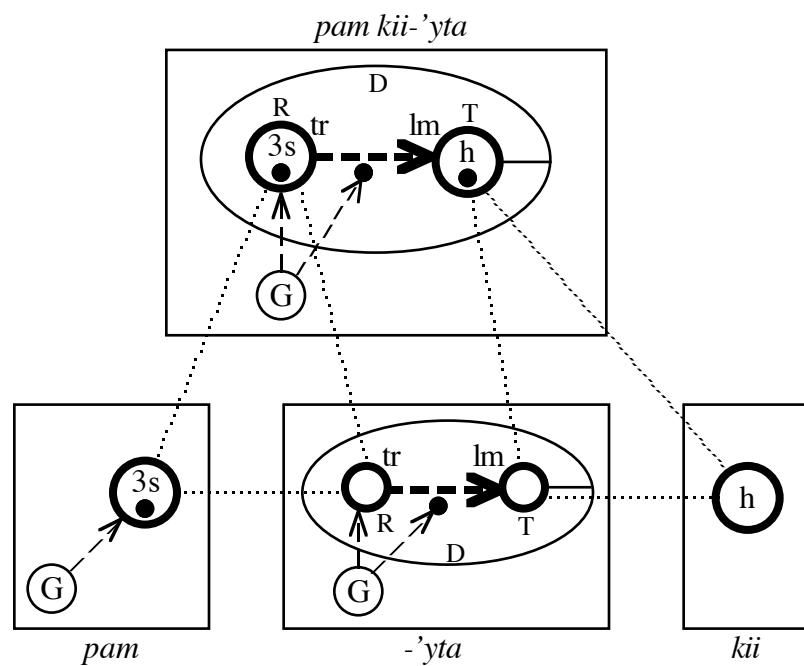
(23) *g huan kii* (ART Juan house) ‘Juan’s house’ [Tohono O’odham]

(24)

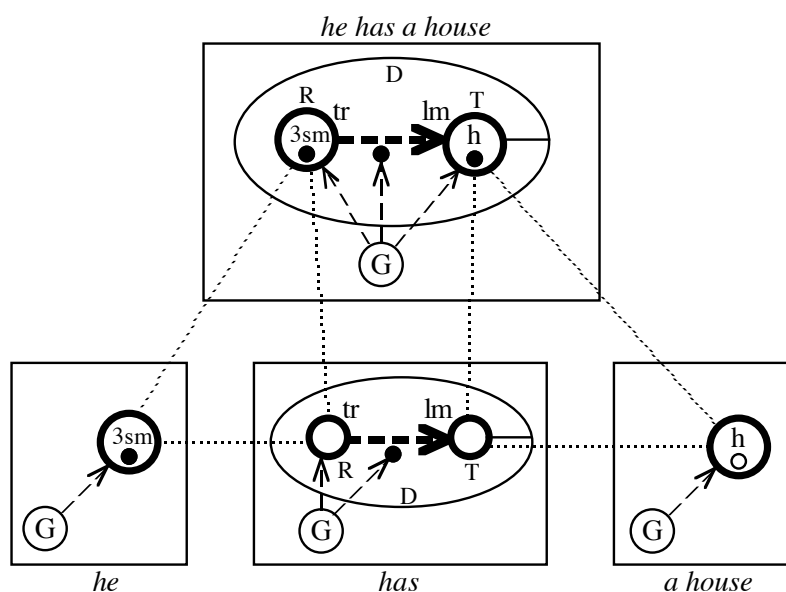


(25) *Pam kii-’yta.* (he house-have) ‘He has a house.’ [Hopi]

(26)



(27)



(28) An instance of a type can either be **actual** or **virtual (fictive)**. A virtual instance is one “conjured up” for some purpose, with no status outside the **mental space** constructed for that purpose. The *default* mental space is actuality.

(29)(a) *Evelyn hopes to invent **a perpetual motion machine**.*

(b) *Whenever we have **a party**, **a guest** breaks **a glass**.*

(c) *We don't have **a dog**.*

(d) *If you buy **a diamond ring**, you should insure it.*

(e) ***A kitten** is born with **blue eyes**.*

(30)(a) *He wants to marry **a Norwegian**. **She** is tall and blonde.*

[specific/actual]

(b) *He wants to marry **a Norwegian**. **She** has to be tall and blonde.*

[non-specific/virtual]

(31)(a) *The most important consideration in buying a car is **the engine**.*

(b) ***The winner** will receive a very nice trophy.*

(c) *In this corporation, **the president** keeps getting younger.*

(32)(a) *I just bought **this shirt**.*

(b) ***This shirt**, I just bought it.*

(c) *I just bought **a shirt**.*

(d) *\***A shirt**, I just bought it.*

(33)(a) *I didn't buy **a shirt**.*

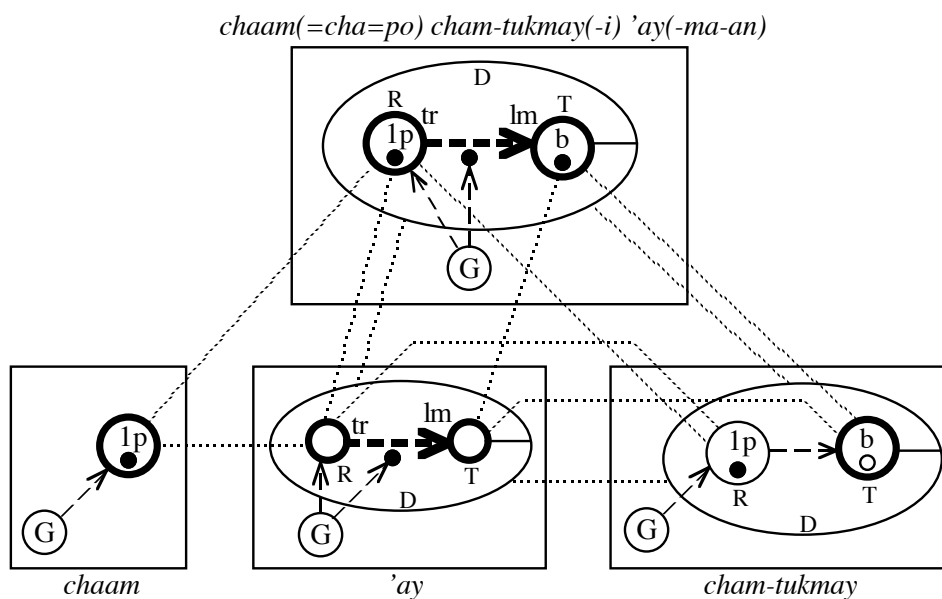
(b) *I didn't buy **this shirt**.*

(34) *Chaam=cha=po cham-tukmay-i 'ay-ma-an. 'We will have a basket.'* [Luiseno]

we=we=FUT our-basket-OBJ have-DUR-FUT

- (35)(a) *The kitten was born deformed—its ears are missing.*  
 (b) *His social skills are non-existent.*

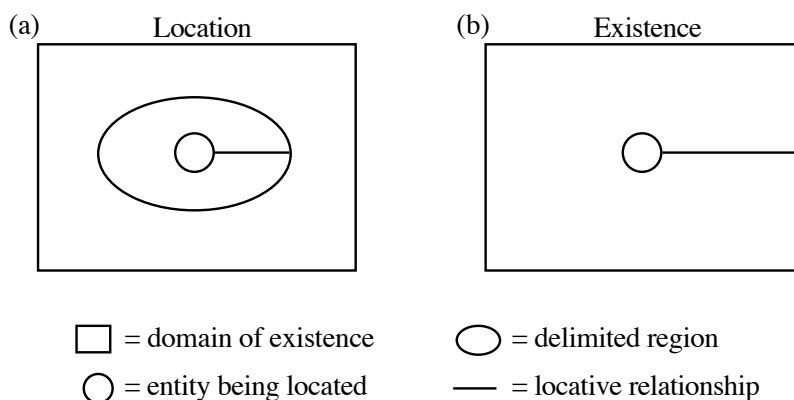
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## D. BE Possessives

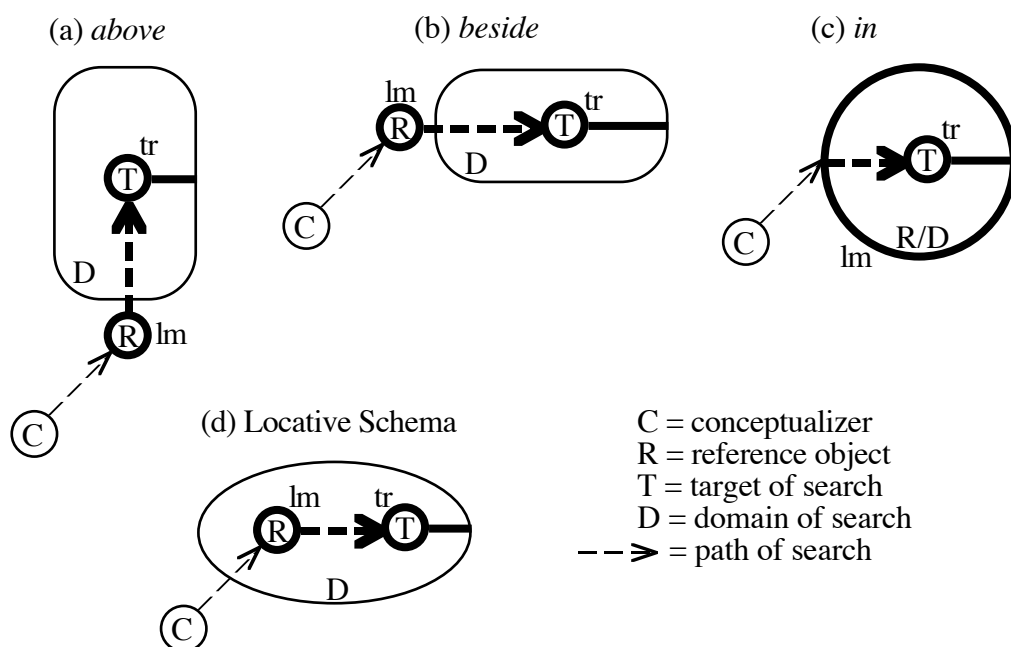
- (37)(a) *U menja kniga.* (at me [is] book) 'I have a book.' [Russian]  
 (b) *Est Johanni liber.* (is John:DAT book) 'John has a book.' [Latin]
- (38)(a) *Wǒ yǒu shū.* (I have book) 'I have a book.' [Mandarin]  
 (b) *Zhūo-shàng yǒu shū.* 'The table has a book [on it].'/ 'There is a book on the table.'
- (39) "...In many, and perhaps in all, languages existential and possessive constructions derive (both synchronically and diachronically) from locatives." (Lyons 1967: 390)

(40)



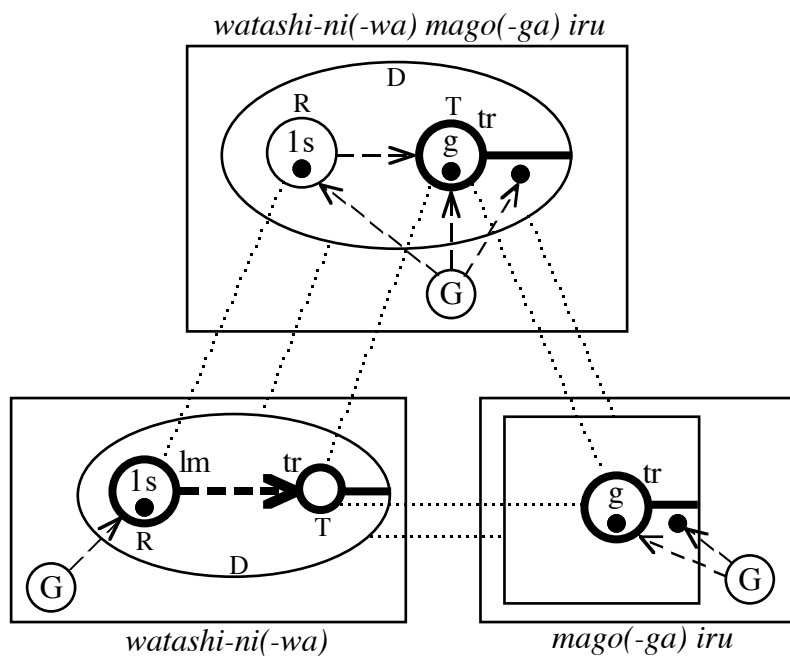


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(42) *Watashi-ni-wa mago-ga iru.* 'I have a grandchild.' [Japanese]  
I-to-TOP grandchild-SUBJ exist

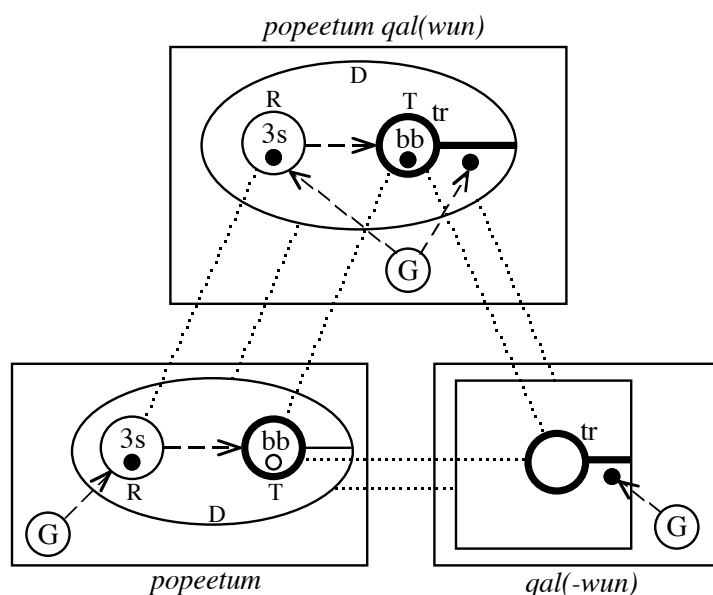
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(44)(a) *Po-peet-um* *qal-wun.* ‘He has younger brothers.’ [Luiseño]  
 his-younger:brother-PL be-PRES:PL

(b) *Po-qees-um=pum* ‘*oma-an.*’ ‘He has no older sisters.’  
 his-older:sister-PL=they not:be-PRES:PL

(45)



## E. Diachronic Perspective

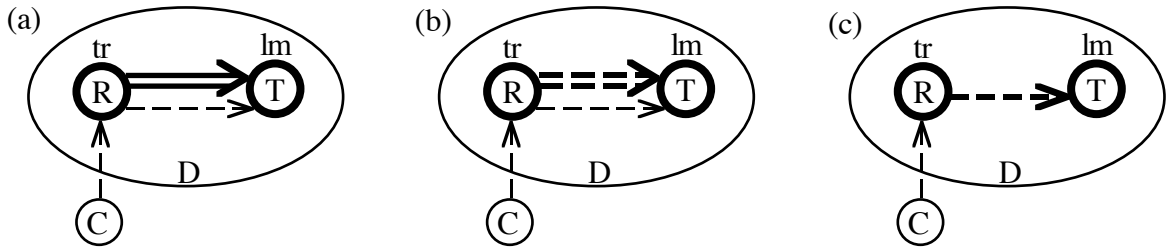
(46) HAVE possessive constructions are “conceptually derived from a propositional structure that typically involves an agent, a patient, and some action or activity. In addition to ‘take’, a number of related action verbs can be employed, such as ‘seize’, ‘grab’, ‘catch’, and the like, but ... verbs like ‘hold’, ‘carry’, ‘get’, ‘find’, ‘obtain’, ‘acquire’, or ‘rule’ can [also] be used.” (Heine 1997: 91)

(47) Proto Uto-Aztecan \**kati* ‘sit’ > Luiseño *qal* ‘be/exist’

(48) What possessives and locatives share is an abstract *conceptual* characterization based on the **reference point** ability.

- (49)(a) *I have an electric toothbrush.*  
 (b) *She has several dogs.*  
 (c) *Jones has a very good job.*  
 (d) *My brother has frequent headaches.*  
 (e) *We have a lot of earthquakes in California.*  
 (f) *Sherridan has brown eyes.*  
 (g) *Their house has four bedrooms.*

(50)

*Agentive Control*

- specific physical event
- actual exertion of force
- perfective verb
- possessive source

*Active Control*

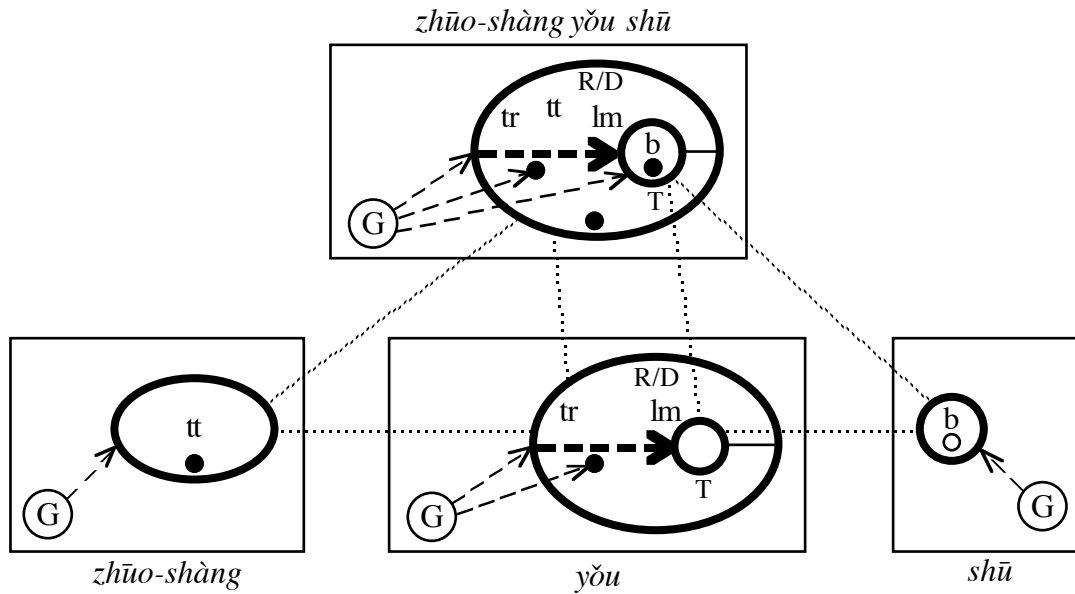
- privilege of access
- potential for interaction
- imperfective verb
- possessive prototype

*Passive Control*

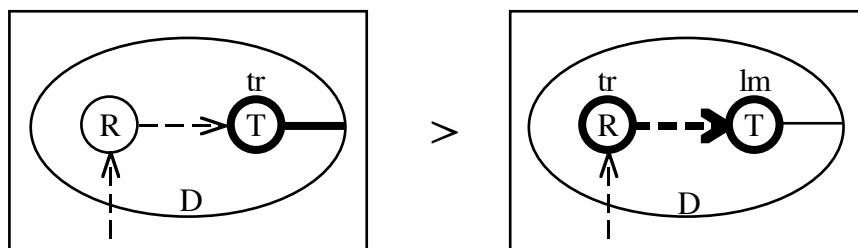
- passive reference point
- mental access by C
- imperfective verb
- possessive schema

(51) When a location functions as reference point for a spatial search, R and D collapse. The delimited region to which a location affords mental access, to find a target, is naturally taken as being that location itself.

(52)



(53)



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