Differential possessive marking: a meaning-based account

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In many languages, the alternation of possessive marking (*differential possessive marking*) gives rise to a meaning effect that can be described as a change in the relation between the possessor and the possessed. For the possessed noun *toqa* 'people' in (1a), this relation is 'origin', while in (1b) it is 'work for'.

(2) a. **toqa**-na fanu qena   b. **toqa**   nia
         people-3   place that   people 3SG
         'people of that place'   'his people (who work for him)'

                                 Toqabaqita (Lichtenberk 2008: 97)

I argue that this meaning effect should be attributed to the semantics of the possessive markers. I provide a pragmatic analysis that relies on the principle *Maximize presupposition* (Heim 1991) in (2).

(2)   Make your contribution presuppose as much as possible!

I argue that the possessive marker in (1a) is maximally specific (MaxSpec): it carries a presupposition that restricts the possessive relations it expresses to those derived from the most salient features of the possessed noun P. By contrast, the marker in (1b) is minimally specific (MinSpec): it a variety of relations including relations that can be derived from the context. The lexical entries are shown in (3).

(3) a. $[\![\text{MaxSpec}]\!]^{g,c} = \lambda R p \lambda P \lambda x \lambda y. R p_n(x,y) \& P(y)$
         (where g(n) is a stereotypical P-based relation)
     b. $[\![\text{MinSpec}]\!]^{g,c} = \lambda R \text{free} \lambda P \lambda x \lambda y. R \text{free}_n(x,y) \& P(y)$
         (where g(n) is a relation provided by c)

References: • Heim, I. (1991): Artikel und definitheit. In *Semantik: Ein internationales Handbuch der zeitgenössischen Forschung*, ed. A. von Stechow and D. Wunderlich. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 487-535. • Lichtenberk, F. (2008): *A grammar of Toqabaqita*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.