

## Disentangling *own*: evidence from association with focus

Giorgos Spathas, University of Stuttgart

The possessive marker *own* exhibits a complicated behavior that gives rise to a wide range of subtle meaning differences. Accordingly, the theoretical literature has proposed a number of different (and, for the most part, informal) characterizations of this element. In, e.g., (1), *own* has been argued to turn *her* into a reflexive possessive pronoun (Higginbotham 1985), whereas in (2) *own* is usually described as some sort of ‘emphatic possessive’ (Baker 1995). This paper uses (primarily) data from association with focus to disentangle the various effects that *own* gives rise to and argue that there are at least two distinct items; *own<sub>R</sub>*, a marker of strong reflexivization, and *own<sub>IP</sub>*, a marker of strong/ inalienable possession.

- (1) Zelda painted her own room. (2) Zelda’s own room is bigger than Lucie’s.

***Own<sub>R</sub>*.** Focused Local Reflexivizers (LR) in the scope of Focus Association Operators (FAOs) like negation in (3), license two types of alternatives; Subject Alternatives (SA, {x praised John}) and Object Alternatives (OA, {John praised x}). Spathas (2010) generates these alternatives by treating LR as a reflexivizing function (4) that contrasts with other arity reducing operations, like Passivization and Anti-Passivization (5). Similarly, focused *own* gives rise to SA ({x painted John’s room}) and Possessor Alternatives (PA, {John painted x’s room}) (6). We capture the alternatives in (6) by treating *own* as a reflexivizer that operates on the complex derived predicate  $\lambda x \lambda y. y \text{ painted } x\text{'s room}$ , which is created after QR of *own<sub>R</sub>* above the head introducing the external argument (7) (cf. the QR treatment of LR in Lechner 2012). Safir (1996) a.o. expresses the intuition that SA support the idea that *own* is an ‘intensifier’, as, e.g., (1) can be paraphrased by the use of the anti-assistive intensifier *herself* in (8). Spathas (2012, 2013) shows that anti-assistive intensifiers, but not reflexivizers, license SA under Conventionally Associating Operators like *only* (Beaver&Clark 2008). Crucially, *own<sub>R</sub>* does not license SA under *only* (9). Notice also that SA cannot be attributed to *her own* being a possessive reflexive interpreted as a designated bound variable, since focused pronouns, which do license bound variable readings, do not license SA (10).

- (3) a. Zelda didn’t praise herSELF. Oscar praised her. SA  
b. Zelda didn’t praise herSELF. She praised Oscar. OA
- (4)  $[[\text{herself}]] = \lambda R_{\text{ref}} \lambda x. R(x)(x)$  (5) a.  $[[\text{PASS}]] = \lambda R \lambda x \exists y. R(x)(y)$  b.  $[[\text{Anti-P}]] = \lambda R \lambda x \exists y. R(y)(x)$
- (6) a. Zelda didn’t paint her OWN room. Oscar painted her room. SA  
b. Zelda didn’t paint her OWN room. She painted Oscar’s room. PA
- (7)  $[_{VP} \text{own}_I [_{VP} V [_{VP} V [_{DP} \text{her} [_{D'} [_{D} \text{'s } t_i] [_{NP} \text{room}]]]]]]]$
- (8) Zelda painted her room herself (i.e. without help).
- (9) a. Zelda only painted her OWN room. #No one else painted her room. \*SA  
b. Zelda only painted her room herSELF. No one else painted her room. SA
- (10) Zelda didn’t paint HER room. #Oscar painted her room. \*SA

Unlike LR, however, which can license strict readings in similar environments, *own<sub>R</sub>* never licenses strict readings in (11). We claim that *own<sub>R</sub>* not only reflexivizes the derived predicate but in addition turns it into a Strong Reflexive relation, i.e. a *necessarily* reflexive relation (12) (based on the definition of Strong Reflexivity in Moulton 2005). Given (12), *own<sub>R</sub>* is predicted to be redundant with complex predicates that are inherently strongly reflexive (13) and to force a self-as-other reading of ambiguous predicates (14).

- (11) a. Only ZELDA painted her own room. #No one else painted Zelda’s room.  
b. \*Zelda painted her own room, because Lucie did <paint Zelda’s room>.
- (12)  $[[\text{own}_R]] = \lambda R \lambda x \lambda e \lambda w. R(x)(x)(e)(w) \ \& \ \forall y \forall z \forall e' \forall w'. R(y)(z)(e')(w') = 1 \rightarrow y = z$
- (13) \*Zelda lost her own mind. (14) Zelda opened her own eyes (with her hands).

Our account predicts *own<sub>R</sub>* to be subject oriented. As predicted, no SA arises when the antecedent of the pronoun is not the subject (15). Also, assuming that *own<sub>R</sub>* will land to the first landing site available for compositional interpretation, we predict *own<sub>R</sub>* to be strictly

local. As predicted, the choice of local vs non-local antecedent leads to distinct interpretations. In particular, only the local antecedent gives rise to SA, (16) vs. (17).

(15) Zelda<sub>1</sub>'s brother didn't paint her<sub>1</sub> OWN room.

#Lucie's brother/Lucie painted Zelda's room.

(16) Zelda<sub>1</sub> didn't ask Lucie<sub>2</sub> to paint her<sub>1</sub> OWN house.

#Oscar asked Lucie to paint Zelda's house.

(17) Zelda<sub>1</sub> didn't ask Lucie<sub>2</sub> to paint her<sub>2</sub> OWN house.

She asked Oscar to paint Lucie's house.

**Own<sub>IP</sub>.** The entry in (12) does not cover cases where reflexivization of a derived predicate is not possible, e.g. (2), (16). As in (7), we assume that *own* merges with the Possessive head 's (Safir 1996), a definite article which introduces a Possession Relation (Barker 1995, 2011) represented in (18) as a free, contextually resolved variable R. For DPs with relational nouns (*Zelda's brother*), which are inherently/ lexically inalienable, we assume the entry in (19). The contribution of *own<sub>IP</sub>* is to compositionally turn a relation R of 'alienable possession' into a relation of 'inalienable possession'; it strengthens R into a *necessary* relation by adding the bold-faced condition in (20) (which we assume is part of the meaning of relational nouns in cases of lexical inalienable possession). The strengthening can apply regardless of the content of R; *own<sub>IP</sub>* does not specify R as literal 'possession' (contra Nishiguchi 2008). In, e.g., (21) R can be any salient relation. The exclusion of alternative possessors in the case of *own<sub>IP</sub>* is part of its truth-conditional meaning, unlike in the case of *own<sub>R</sub>* where PA is an effect of focus and requires stress on *own<sub>R</sub>*. *own<sub>IP</sub>*, then, cannot be taken to signal focus on the possessor (contra Nishiguchi 2008); the existence of salient alternative possessors is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to license *own<sub>IP</sub>*. Since DPs with and without *own<sub>IP</sub>* are extensionally equivalent in context, use of *own<sub>IP</sub>* requires that the (in)alienability of R is at issue. E.g., the context in (22) (Zribi-Hertz 1996, (77)), which licenses *own<sub>IP</sub>*, does not make salient alternative possessors of John's dog, but alternative animals (dogs among them) with which John can be in some fleeting relation. In (23), where *own* appears in the scope of an intensional transitive verb, the speaker does not express a wish to be in some possessive relation R with a room, but to be in an inalienable possession relation with a room. As in the case of *own<sub>R</sub>*, we predict that use of *own<sub>IP</sub>* will be degraded if R is lexically inalienable, e.g. if the NP is a body-part. This prediction appears to be borne out, as long as care is taken to exclude a parse with *own<sub>R</sub>*. Consider (24). In a context in which the speaker looks at the hand of the hearer and notices that it is smaller than his, (24) is degraded. In a context where the speaker and the hearer have been given pictures of hands, however, (24) is felicitous. We assume that in this latter case the relational noun has been detransitivized (Barker 1995), before combining with the determiner in (19). Notice that the account does not predict that the hand in (24) cannot be the speaker's actual hand; it only predicts that the relation R between the speaker and the hand is not the body-part relation, but some alienable relation.

(18)  $\llbracket 's \rrbracket = \lambda P_{et} \lambda y_{tx}. P(x) \ \& \ R(x)(y)$       (19)  $\llbracket 's \rrbracket = \lambda R_{e,et} \lambda y_{tx}. R(x)(y)$

(20)  $\llbracket 's \text{ own} \rrbracket = \lambda P \lambda y \lambda e \lambda w_{tx}. P(x)(w) \ \& \ R(x)(y)(e)(w) \ \& \ \forall z \forall e' \forall w'. R(x)(z)(e')(w') = 1 \rightarrow z = y$

(21) My own cloud is nicer than yours.

(22) My friend John<sub>1</sub> already knew that Mary<sub>2</sub> disliked animals, but he has been taking tranquillizers since he heard the awful news: John's sister<sub>2</sub> hates his<sub>1</sub> own dog as well.

(23) I am tired of sharing. I want my own room.      (24) My own hand is bigger than yours.

**Selected references.** Baker, M. 1995. Contrast, discourse prominence and intensification. *Language* 71.1:63-101. Barker, C. 1995. *Possessive Descriptions*. CSLI Publications. Lechner, W. 2012. Towards a theory of transparent reflexivization. Ms. Moulton, K. 2005. Strong Reflexivity and Attitudes de se: Evidence from ECM. ConSOLE XVI. Nishiguchi, S. 2008. Own. Proceedings of 80th Meeting of ELSG: 116-118. Safir, K. 1996. Semantic atoms of anaphora. NLLT 14.3: 545-589. Spathas, G. 2010. Focus on anaphora. LOT dissertation.