On Prenominal Modifiers: PF Insertion of the so-called Genitive Case Marker

Based on a set of novel data, I examine the nature of prenominal modification markers (PM) in Korean, including the so-called genitive Case marker uy. Following Kitagawa and Ross (1982), I propose that PM are inserted in PF. The upshot of the current proposal is that the genitive marker uy is fundamentally different from ‘s in English. The current analysis can also be extended to Japanese and has implications for the structure of noun phrases in the languages in question (SLM 2008).

(1) and (2) illustrate the basic distribution of PM in Korean: in (1), [+N] prenominal modifiers are marked with the genitive marker uy; in (2), [+V] items are marked with a word-final nasal n. (I ignore the tense/aspect inflection that can be morphologically fused with n.) In non-prenominal contexts, uy and n do not appear, as shown in (3). Interestingly, example (4), which involves coordination, is ambiguous. In particular, it allows the interpretation in (4)b where it means that there are two houses separately owned by John and Mary. That such an interpretation is available is shown by (5) where the adverb charyero ‘in turn’ forces the interpretation in (4)b (and excludes (4)a). It seems then reasonable to assume that at LF, there are two instances of the head noun cip ‘house’ under (4)b and that they are reduced to one on the surface. Given this, for ease of exposition, I assume that under the interpretation in (4)b, (4) is derived by ellipsis, as in (6). (Other devices have also been proposed to account for the reduction phenomenon in coordinated structures—e.g., ATB movement, multi-dominance. I am not concerned here with choosing the best analysis of the reduction phenomenon, since the proposal is basically consistent with all of them.)

The crucial puzzle is posed by the ungrammaticality of (7), which is very similar to (4) except that the conjuncts contain an adjective as well as a genitive possessor. Note that (8) shows that there is no prohibition against co-occurrence of a genitive possessor and an adjective. It is also difficult to attribute the ill-formedness of (7) to the apparent fact that the possessor and the adjective do not form a constituent. In fact, under the standard assumption that noun phrases involve a fairly sophisticated functional structure, it is quite easy to allow these elements to be embedded in a bigger structure that forms a constituent. The situation is even more puzzling given that the English counterpart in (9) is grammatical. (N.B. For (9) to be acceptable, it should be read like a right node raising sentence. Crucially, Korean also allows right node raising (see An 2007 and references therein).

I propose that the previously unnoted contrast between (4)/(8) and (7) (and also between Korean and English) stems from the fact that only (7) involves elements that are marked with PM in the first conjunct—i.e., John-uy ‘John’s’, ppalka-n ‘red’. There is strong evidence that the occurrence of PM here is the source of the problem. First, note that uy is optional on adjuncts, as shown by (10). Given this, consider the contrast in (11): crucially, (11) is only ruled out when the genitive marker uy appears on the adjunct in the first conjunct. (In (11), John does not cause any problems, since it is without the genitive marker. In addition, when uy appears on the adjunct ecey ‘yesterday’, (11) can be good, but it receives an irrelevant reading where ecey locally modifies John, not kanguy ‘lecture’.) (11) should also be compared with (12) where the same adjunct is legitimately marked with uy.

Given the grammaticality of (8)/(12) and the above discussion regarding constituency, it is very unlikely that the ill-formedness of (7)/(11) can be attributed to purely syntactic factors. For instance, if we assume uy is a realization of abstract genitive Case, there does not seem to be any reason why this Case should fail to be assigned in (7)/(11). The important question then is what makes (7)/(11) different from (8)/(12). I suggest that the relevant factor here has to do with the fact that the former involves coordination reduction as a result of which the head noun of the first conjunct disappears on the surface. More specifically, I propose that PMs like uy and n are inserted in PF in contexts outlined in (13). Given this, at the point in PF where the Mod-Insertion Rule in (13) applies, the head noun of the first conjunct in (7)/(11) effectively disappears from the brackets of its noun phrase as a result of coordination reduction, failing to provide a proper environment for licensing PM insertion, as illustrated in (14).

Consequences: (a) uy, which has usually been called a genitive Case marker, must be fundamentally different from its English counterpart ‘s. That is, while ‘s is inserted in the syntax as the head of a functional projection (Abney 1985, Sobin 2002), uy is inserted in PF; (b) uy and n, which have been considered unrelated categories in the traditional grammar of Korean, are subject to a uniform analysis.
(1) a. **John-uy cip** (possessors)  
   ‘John’s house’  
   b. **Ecey-uy kanguy** (adjuncts)  
   ‘yesterday’s lecture’  
   c. **Babarian-uy roma-uy gonggyek** (arguments)  
   ‘barbarian’s attack on Rome’

(2) a. **Ku-n cip**  
   big-mod house  
   ‘a big house’  
   b. **John-i ilknu-n chayk**  
   J-nom read-mod book  
   ‘the book that John reads’

(3) a. **cwuinkong-un John-ita.** (Cf. (1)a)  
   main actor-top J-cop  
   ‘The main actor is John.’  
   b. **Cip-i ku-ta.** (Cf. (2)a)  
   house-nom big-dec  
   ‘The house is big.’

(4) **John-kwa Mary-uy cip**  
   J-and M-gen house  
   a. A house owned by John and Mary. → 1 house.  
   b. John’s house and Mary’s house. → 2 houses.

(5) **Totuk-i John-kwa Mary-uy cip-ul charyero telessta.**  
   thief-nom J-and M-gen house-acc in turn robbed  
   ‘A thief robbed John’s house and Mary’s house in turn.’

(6) **Ellipsis**  
   [John’s house] & [Mary’s house]

(7) a. **John-uy ku-ko Mary-uy caku-n cip**  
   J-gen big-and M-gen small-mod house  
   ‘John’s big (house) and Mary’s small house’  
   b. **ppalka-n John-kwa para-n Mary-uy cha**  
   red-mod J-and blue-mod M-gen car  
   ‘John’s red (car) and Mary’s blue (car)’

(8) a. **John-uy ku-n cip**  
   J-gen big-mod house  
   ‘John’s big house’  
   b. **ppalka-n John-uy cha**  
   red-mod J-gen car  
   ‘John’s red car’

(9) **John’s big, and Mary’s small, house**  
   (N.B. Commas indicate the position of a pause.)

(10) **Ecey(-uy) kanguy**  
   yesterday-gen lecture

(11) **Ecey(*-uy) John-kwa kucey Mary-uy kanguy**  
   yesterday-gen J-and the day before yesterday M-gen lecture  
   ‘(intended) John’s yesterday’s lecture and Mary’s the-day-before-yesterday’s lecture’

(12) **Ecey-uy John-uy kanguy**  
   yesterday-gen J-gen lecture  
   ‘Yesterday’s John’s lecture’

(13) **PF Mod-Insertion Rule: XP → XP-mod / [NP … XP … N], where mod is realized as uy if XP is [+N] and as n if XP is [+V].**  
   (N.B. I ignore the distinction between NP and DP here.)

(14) a. * [NP Possessor-uy Adjective Λ] and … / * [NP Adjective-n Possessor Λ] and … (= (7)a/b)  
   b. * [NP Adjunct-uy Possessor Λ] and … (= (11))