

## The semantics of property concept root categorizers

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It is widely known that property concepts (PCs) (Dixon 1982, Thompson 1989) – notions canonically expressed as adjectives in English – are often expressed by nouns or verbs in other languages. In addition to variation in category, PCs also vary in how they are predicated, with a **possessive** morphosyntax in particular being common alongside PCs that are *nominal* in category:

- (1) *Possession + noun*
- a. **Tengo**    *hambre*  
       **have.1.SG** hunger  
       ‘I’m hungry.’ Spanish
  - b. *Munà*    **dà**    *karfī*.  
       we.CONT **with** strength  
       ‘We are strong.’ Hausa, Newman 2000:224

Francez & Koontz-Garboden (2017) (FKG) argue that possessive predication is triggered in such cases because the PC nouns have a mass semantics, characterizing sets of abstract matter, rather than sets of ordinary individuals as adjectives and verbs do. While FKG and Menon & Pancheva (2014) raise conjectures about whether these crosslinguistic differences in morphosyntax are driven by variation in the meanings of PC roots, Hanink & Koontz-Garboden (2023b) argue more explicitly, based on data from Wá-šiw (Hokan/isolate), that PC roots do indeed vary in their meanings, with some of them having the mass-type meaning and others having the individual characterizing one. Further, Hanink & Koontz-Garboden (2023a) show that it is not, in fact, only nouns that show reflexes of possession, but rather verbs and adjectives as well, in virtue of their occurring with overt categorizers of PC roots that can be independently shown to have possessive meaning.

In this talk, we lay out the data from Hanink and Koontz-Garboden’s work in support of (i) semantic variation in the root, and (ii) possession in nominal, verbal and adjectival categorization. Our observations are cast in Distributed Morphology theoretic terms, but we show also that they are independent of that framework. We then consider how these two points of variation interact with one another across category, showing that cross-classification with the three major categories predicts a typology with 12 cells. Of these, we lay out data showing which cells we know to be filled, drawing on analyses of Ulwa (Francez & Koontz-Garboden 2015), Hausa (Newman 2000), Spanish, Basaa (Jenks et al 2018), English, and Wá-šiw (Hanink & Koontz-Garboden 2021).

little n

	possessive n	non-possessive n
mass denoting root	Ulwa <i>-ka</i>	unmarked mass quality nouns (English, Hausa, Spanish, etc.)
individual characterizing root	???	unmarked PC nouns in Basaa

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little a

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	possessive a	non-possessive a
mass denoting root	English <i>-y</i> adjs	<b>unattested</b>
individual characterizing root	???	unmarked English adjectives

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little v

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	possessive v	non-possessive v
mass denoting root	Washo <i>-iʔ</i> verbs	???
individual characterizing root	???	unmarked Washo PC verbs

We further take note of a number of gaps: (i) possessives of any category categorizing individual characterizing roots; (ii) non-possessive little a categorizing a mass-denoting root; and (iii) non-possessive v categorizing a mass denoting root. We believe all of these gaps are principled. Regarding (i), drawing on (Francez & Koontz-Garboden 2016) who discuss a construction predicted to generate precisely this meaning in Ulwa, we argue it is unattested because the meaning created is pragmatically odd. Regarding (ii), we discuss an argument from Francez & Koontz-Garboden (2017:Chapter 6) who claim that mass denoting adjectives would fail in the key function of adjectives to be possible subsecutive modifiers of any nominal meaning. Finally, regarding (iii) we conjecture that they are unattested, like the absence of mass-denoting adjectives, for reasons to do with the nature of verbhood. Verbs are necessarily predicates, and a predicate with a mass type meaning would be useless, with no words having a denotation that could be used as an argument.

This work shows that categorization and lexical semantics are intermingled with one another. Categorizers can carry more meaning than generally appreciated, and this meaning interacts with root meaning in ways that generate possible and impossible meanings for words with different categories. From this it follows that there are classes of meanings that words with particular categories can/cannot have.

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