Possessive structures and genitive case: Spanish and English compared

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POSSESSIVE STRUCTURES AND GENITIVE CASE: SPANISH AND ENGLISH

COMPARED

A Thesis Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Designation

University Honors with Distinction

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University of Northern Iowa

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has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation

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Date Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program
Abstract

Although possessive constructions are formed differently in Spanish as compared to English, most notably through the insertion of the preposition *de* as compared to the Saxon genitive ‘s, both languages require that possessive Θ-roles must be assigned and possessive Case must be checked when possessive constructions are formed. This research follows authors such as Picallo (1994), Antrim (2003), and Bernstein (2005) to propose that possessive Θ-roles and possessive Case are assigned and checked, respectively, by specific, separate functional projections, which are only generated in instances of a possessive relationship. Using the principles of minimalism, examples of Spanish and English possessive constructions with both nominal and pronominal possessors are analyzed to demonstrate how this Agreement projection (AgrP) and Possessive phrase (PossP) are derived in both languages. The implications of various types of possessive pronouns, including clitic, weak, and strong pronouns, are also discussed, and possible lines of future research are presented for exceptional constructions involving Spanish pronouns such as *nuestro* and *suyo*. 
Introduction

The English and Spanish languages, deriving from different source languages, differ significantly in terms of syntax and grammatical structure. One of these differences can be seen in the various types of constructions available in each language for expressing a possessive relationship. As many beginning students of Spanish are taught, the common English construction using the possessive ‘s, as in John’s car, is not permitted in Spanish. Instead, they must invert the syntax and insert a preposition to create the Spanish phrase el coche de Juan.

However, there is much more to this syntactic phenomenon than most speakers of both languages are aware. A deeper analysis of the constructions available in both languages reveals that although Spanish and English present possessive constructions differently, both languages follow a similar pattern in generating the functional projections that create these phrases. A minimalist analysis of syntax, combined with a brief exploration of the historical development of both Spanish and English, is key to understanding why these same functional projections produce different syntactic structures in both languages.

As they constitute a primary difference between English and Spanish, a more thorough understanding of possessive constructions will contribute to the continued development of Spanish-English syntax, particularly concerning nominal possessive phrases. Although there is much research addressing the use of possessive pronouns in both Spanish and English, there is less emphasis on the use of nominal possessors and how their use may result in different constructions from those using possessive pronouns. In this thesis, I will present analyses of both nominal and pronominal possessive constructions to expand the work begun by renowned minimalist syntacticians such as Piccallo (1994), Antrim (2003), and Bernstein (2005).
Therefore, this thesis will contribute to advancing the tools of syntactic inquiry by proposing a unique analysis of possessive constructions in both Spanish and English and clarifying why they differ. It may also be of value to translators and interpreters seeking to more closely understand the languages in which they work, and indicates an area of focus for teachers of Spanish by revealing potential difficulties learners may have with exceptional pronouns. Finally, my work will open new directions of inquiry, particularly with exceptional Spanish possessive pronouns such as *nuestro* and *suyo* (which, as I will explain, do not appear to follow the patterns displayed by most other Spanish pronouns), to be explored by future researchers.
Literature Review

To understand the role played by possessive constructions in both Spanish and English, this literature review will include two main sections. In the first, a brief summary of the history and relevant aspects of minimalism will be offered, to foreground the theory that will be used to complete syntactic analysis throughout this thesis. The second section will include summaries of the behavior of the various types of possessive constructions in both languages, addressing both nominal and pronominal possessors.

Minimalism

Minimalism is a theory of syntax that arose in the 1990s in response to the perceived overcomplication of the rules of the previous government and binding style of syntax (Chomsky, 1995). The many facets of minimalism are beyond the scope of this literature review, which will focus on two key aspects relevant to possessive structures: 1) theta roles (Θ-roles) and the Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH) and 2) the principles that govern syntactic movement.

Θ.Roles and UTAH

Radford (1997) defined Θ-roles as synonymous with thematic roles, describing them as the semantic role “played by a given argument in relation to its predicate” (p. 164). Zagona (2002) agreed with this analysis and adds that Θ-roles indicate not only the semantic relation between argument and predicate, but also “the number of arguments required by a predicate” (p. 77). (Note that “thematic roles” are semantic concepts, while “Θ-roles” are syntactic ones.) These Θ-roles are assigned by lexical categories, such as nouns and verbs. For example, in the sentence *Juan le mandó un paquete a María/Juan sent a package to María*, the verb *mandar/to send* assigns three Θ-roles. *Juan* receives the Θ-role of Agent (the entity completing the action of the
verb), *package/paquete* is the Theme (the entity to which the action of the verb occurs), and *María* is the Goal (the direction or recipient of the action described by the verb).

Θ-roles are relatively clear-cut with verbs because they are required by the meaning of the verb itself. As explained by the Theta Criterion first proposed by Friedin (1978), each argument must receive one (but only one) θ-role, and each θ-role must be assigned to one and (only one) argument. For example, in the above sentence, *mandar/to send* requires both an Agent and a Theme in order to make semantic sense. (*Juan sent* is not a complete sentence; it requires the Theme.) Thus, it is clear that the verb itself assigns the Θ-role to the other words in the sentence.

However, when it comes to nouns (particularly nouns in possessive structures) the question of which grammatical element assigns the Θ-role is complicated because the Θ-role is not required — there is no inherent semantic property of a noun that requires it to have a possessor.¹ In other words, every noun has the ability to be possessed, but very few nouns *must* be possessed, meaning that the idea that the noun itself assigns the possessive Θ-role may not be the most likely explanation. Instead, I will argue that it is the functional projection, not the lexical category, that assigns the Θ-role, as explained in more detail in the Analysis section.

To return to the general properties of minimalism, a direct offshoot of Θ-roles is the Uniformity of Theta-Assignment Hypothesis, or UTAH, first proposed by Baker (1988). He argued that if two arguments share a thematic relationship (that is, they fulfill the same Θ-role in two different constructions), these two arguments must therefore have originated in the same location in the original construction. In practical terms, the sentences *The students were arrested*

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¹ Several exceptional noun classes do require a possessive relationship, such as kinship nouns (*mother, uncle, boss, neighbor, friend*), iconic nouns (*picture*), and deverbal nouns (those derived from a verbal root, such as *derivation* from *derive*).
by the police and The police arrested the students convey an identical meaning, although their structures are different. In both instances, the police fulfills the Θ-role of “agent” of the verb arrest, while the students takes on the role of “experiencer.” Since their Θ-roles are the same in both constructions, UTAH indicates that they must have originated in the same position in the sentence’s structure.

Applied to possessive constructions, UTAH is important for two key reasons. First, it predicts that possessive pronouns must originate in the same sentence structure position as the nouns or noun phrases (NPs) to which they refer (for example, in her backpack and Jane’s backpack, since her refers to Jane, both fulfill the Θ-role of possessor and thus must originate in the same position). Secondly, it requires that constituents in genitive -s constructions must originate in the same position as those in of-phrase constructions (for example, his car and the car of his convey an identical meaning, and his fulfills the Θ-role of possessor in both phrases; thus, it originates in the same position in the original structure of both phrases).

Rules of Syntactic Movement

However, even if these constituents originated in identical positions, their final positions are different, meaning that they must have moved at some point in the formation of the sentence. Minimalism follows specific rules that govern the movement of constituents. These include the shortest movement principle, or the assumption that constituents should always move the shortest distance possible, and the chain uniformity principle, which states that constituents must move to a position that follows the same structure as its previous position (Radford, 1997). That is to say, heads must move to head position, phrases must move to phrase positions, etc.
Prior to minimalism, when the government and binding theory of syntax was prevalent, the various stages of syntactic movement were collectively described using the “T-Model” due to the upside-down T-shape they create, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: T-Model of Syntactic Movement**

Deep Structure (D-Structure)

| Overt syntax |

Phonological Form (PF) ----------- Surface Structure (S-structure) ----------- Logical Form (LF)

Covert syntax

As Figure 1 indicates, sentences begin in deep structure (D-structure), where Θ-roles are assigned but constituents may not be in their final position. The first stage of syntactic movement, overt syntax, results in surface structure, where constituents have moved to the word order a speaker of the language recognizes. From there, S-structure is fed to both phonological form (PF), the phonological component of the grammar, and logical form (LF), the semantic component of the grammar. Although overt syntax has completed the word order, covert syntax may still perform syntactic operations as the sentence converges at LF.

Again, it should be noted that the T-Model was modified following the advent of minimalism, most notably in regard to the ideas of deep and surface structure. Rather than assuming that the sentence must be checked at each of these levels to apply certain principles such as the Theta Criterion, minimalism allows these principles to be applied dynamically (that is, “on the way” through the derivation of the sentence). However, the T-Model is still a useful way to describe the difference between overt and covert syntax, because it still describes the
steps that are taking place; minimalism simply loosened the restrictions on when during the derivation those steps must happen.

This explains how linguists understand where a constituent begins in the sentence’s original structure and how it moves to its final position but does not address why such movement should occur. Minimalism addresses this question through the concept of checking, the “cancelling out” of grammatical features within a sentence. Radford (1997) used the example that nominative pronouns (I/you/he/she) must have their nominative Case checked (since all noun phrases must have Case checked), meaning that they need to be in the nominative, or subject, position of the sentence.

Checking may take place as part of either overt or covert syntax, but it must be completed before the sentence arrives at LF, which should contain only interpretable features, or the grammatical features necessary to understand the semantics of the sentence (for example, the plural -s marking). Uninterpretable features, such as Case, will have been checked and thus should not be visible in the final version of the sentence, allowing the sentence to be grammatical or “converge” at LF. If they are visible (meaning they have not been checked), the sentence is ungrammatical and will “crash.” Thus, constituents move within a sentence in order to check their grammatical features. Two of these grammatical features that will be important to the present analysis are Case, which will be covered in the following section, and definiteness.

Definiteness, also called [D] feature, specifies the reference of the constituent (for example, my car vs a car). Since it is still “visible” in the final version of the sentence, it is an interpretable feature. However, it may also need to be checked, even though that checking will not “cancel out” the feature. This is because definiteness in this instance is a “viral” feature, one
that forces overt movement. Here, the movement that is forced is that of the possessive pronoun, which will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections.

**Types of Possessive Constructions**

Having addressed several of the pertinent aspects of minimalism, I now turn to an introduction of the types of possessive constructions available in both Spanish and English, as well as the role played by Case in these constructions.

In both languages, possessive constructions may be formed with either a nominal or pronominal possessor. This possessor may appear either before the possessed noun, in the prenominal determiner (D) position, or after the possessed noun, in a postnominal prepositional phrase (PP). Table 1 describes this (* indicates an ungrammatical construction):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>D position (prenominal)</th>
<th>PP position (postnominal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal</td>
<td>Permitted</td>
<td>Permitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John’s car</td>
<td>his car</td>
<td>The car of John’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronominal</td>
<td>Permitted</td>
<td>Permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his car</td>
<td>The car of his</td>
<td>Permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spanish</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal</td>
<td>Not permitted</td>
<td>Permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Juan’s coche</em></td>
<td>su coche</td>
<td>el coche de Juan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronominal</td>
<td>Permitted</td>
<td>Permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el coche suyo</td>
<td>Permit</td>
<td>Permit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nominal Possessors**

Some of the most obvious differences between Spanish and English arise when comparing the two languages’ use of nominal possessors; English permits nominal possessors both postnominally and prenominally, whereas Spanish only permits the postnominal form. However, although English does permit a nominal possessor to appear after the possessed noun (*the car of John’s*), it is not generally the most common option. The Saxon genitive -’s, a syntactic category²

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² Although non-linguists may assume that the Saxon genitive -’s is a morpheme, it is widely accepted by linguists that it is not, since it can attach to phrases rather than single units (as in the phrases [my uncle]’s car, [a professor of philosophy]’s car, and [the person who lives in that house]’s car).
absent in Spanish, is often preferred, especially with animate possessors; thus, *John's car* seems more natural than *the car of John's* (Altelarrea Llorente, 2013, p. 10). However, with inanimate possessors, according to Hill and Bradford (2000, p. 94), the second option is preferred; it is more natural to say *the top of the hill* than *the hill’s top*. Both are grammatical, but in general, English possessive constructions with *of* are considered periphrastic (Wolford, 2006; Altelarrea Llorente, 2013), meaning they are indirect and use more words than necessary. Biber et al. (2002) added that *of*-phrases are especially common in academic or professional writing, while genitive -s enjoys the most popularity in news writing, where direct, concise phrases are favored (p. 85). Thus, although both constructions are grammatical, they tend to be used in different contexts.

The interesting point is that the Saxon genitive -s is not simply used in prenominal position; in some instances, it is necessary in postnominal position as well (*the car of John’s* and not *the car of John*), while in Spanish, the function of the genitive is covered when the possessing NP is in postnominal position. Biber et al. (2002) referred to this phenomenon in English as the “double genitive” (p. 82). These differences, and the differences in the use of possessive pronouns also seen in Table 1, can be connected to fundamental differences in the expression of Case in Spanish vs. English.

Case is defined as a morphological category of nouns that marks the grammatical function of the noun in the sentence (Mackenzie, 1999). (Note that “Case,” when referencing the morphological feature, is capitalized to avoid confusion with the common English word “case” used to mean “instance” or “example.”) For example, a noun in the nominative Case would, according to traditional grammatical categorizations, serve as the subject of the sentence, while one in the accusative Case would be the object of that sentence.
Case may be overt, meaning that it is morphologically visible and that the word itself changes according to its grammatical function. In both modern Spanish and English, this occurs with pronouns: the nominative pronouns (yo/tú/el/ella vs. I/you/he/she), the accusative pronouns (mí/te/lo/la vs. me/you/him/her), and genitive/possessive pronouns (mi/tu/su vs. my/your/his/her). However, Case may also be an abstract feature, not morphologically realized but still potentially responsible for syntactic movement within a sentence. In modern Spanish and English, this occurs with nouns: although their grammatical function within the sentence changes, the nouns themselves do not change, unlike with pronouns. This is seen in Table 2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nominative</th>
<th>Accusative</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overt</strong></td>
<td>He saw her vs. He</td>
<td>He</td>
<td>Her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She saw him</td>
<td>She</td>
<td></td>
<td>Him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Él la vio vs.</td>
<td>Él</td>
<td>Él</td>
<td>La</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella lo vio</td>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>Lo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
<td>A man saw a dog. vs. A man</td>
<td>A dog</td>
<td>A man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A dog saw a man</td>
<td>A dog</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un hombre vio un perro. vs. Un hombre</td>
<td>Un perro</td>
<td>Un perro</td>
<td>Un hueso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un perro vio un hueso</td>
<td>Un perro</td>
<td>Un hueso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, pronouns in both Spanish and English display their Case overtly, while nouns display it abstractly, not visibly in morphological terms. However, it is worth noting that nouns in both languages originally also displayed overt Case, as seen in historical linguistic evidence.

**Historical Development of Case.** English is a Germanic language, a descendent of Old English, while Spanish is a Romance language, a descendant of Latin. In both Old English and
Latin, nouns were marked by overt Case: Old English had four Cases (accusative, nominative, genitive, and dative) (Janda, 1980, p. 244), while Latin had six (adding ablative and vocative) (Mackenzie, 1999). But in both, the overt Case system for nouns gradually lost its morphological realization. It did not disappear completely, since all NPs must have Case, but transitioned to the abstract system described above. The two languages developed this abstract Case expression differently, however, which may explain why their possessive structures now differ.

According to Barddal and Kuliko (2009), in Old English, the overt genitive for nouns disappeared during the 12th-13th centuries (p. 477). The genitive had been represented, at least in some instances, by the inflectional affix -(e)i/y)s, according to Rosenbach (2004), and this inflectional affix gradually underwent a "degrammaticalization" and became the form his, as a result of the phonological similarity between the sound of -(e)i/y)s and his. Rosenbach (2004) described this as the “his-genitive,” and said that this form of the genitive eventually became the Saxon genitive -s, which we have today, as can be seen in Figure 2 (Rosenbach, 2004, p 75):

Figure 2: Progression of the -s genitive in Old English

In other words, when Old English “lost” its genitive Case marker for nouns, in order to fulfill the grammatical requirement that all NPs have Case, the language “solved the problem” through an affix which attaches to the noun and fulfills that Case-checking requirement.
However, Spanish follows a different model, because its ancestor, Latin, responded differently to the disappearance of overt Case. According to Mackenzie (1999), spoken Latin gradually began to use prepositions to fulfill grammatical functions in general; he stated that “the overwhelming trend was towards the use of prepositions for all Case-related functions other than subject and direct object.” Spanish follows this model: according to Barddal and Kuliko (2009), Spanish does not have an overt genitive Case in terms of the expression of nouns; it only exists in the form of genitive pronouns. For possessive constructions using nominal possessors, which require Case, Spanish uses the preposition *de* to fulfill this Case-checking requirement.

**Possessive Pronouns and Agreement**

Having discussed the different possessive constructions using nominal possessives in Spanish and English, I return to the other half of Table 1: possessive pronouns. Here, the two languages may appear more syntactically parallel, but key differences arise in terms of the pronouns’ agreement.

As a basic explanation, the grammatical term “agreement” refers to the fact that any constituent that enters a certain semantic relation with another constituent must match that constituent’s grammatical features. This is commonly seen in subject-verb agreement (Biber et al., 2002, p. 232), where the correct suffix for a verb is chosen to match the subject of that verb (in Spanish, the -*o* ending for present-tense *yo*, for example). Agreement also applies to pronouns, since the pronoun is co-referent with a noun or NP, meaning they refer to the same person/object (*he/él* may refer to *John/Juan*, for example). Thus, the pronoun must match some grammatical features of that noun.

Possessive pronouns may include gender, number, and person information referring to either the possessor or the possessed. These three categories form a group of features collectively
called “phi-features” (Picallo, 1994), with “phi” referring to the Greek letter for \( p \), as in “personal features.” Phi-features may be either interpretable or uninterpretable, and according to Picallo, identifying interpretable phi-features is a requirement in order to process the semantics of the sentence and arrive at Logical Form (as shown in Figure 1, above). This identification can occur in one of two ways. First, it may be achieved through specification. This is perhaps a more accurate term for any coincidence of features between the pronoun and the possessor, which may not truly be considered “agreement” in the syntactic sense (as Antrim (2003) claimed), so much as an inherent lexical feature of the pronoun’s status as the referent of the possessor.

The other method of identification, agreement through checking, is seen in agreement between the pronoun and the possessed. Since the pronoun does not serve as the referent of the possessed, phi-features that refer to the possessed are not interpretable and thus must be checked through syntactic movement, following the T-model as outlined above.

A related aspect of pronoun behavior is the Avoid Pronoun Principle (APP), which dictates that phi-features “should be as unspecified as possible” (Picallo, 1994, p. 269). In practical terms, this means that pronouns and their phi-features should be used only when absolutely necessary to clarify the meaning of a sentence, up to grammaticality. This is more applicable in Spanish, where, for example, the sentence *Yo gané* could also be expressed simply as *Gané*— in English, of course, *I won* is the only grammatical option. This means that, when deciding how to identify phi-features in a sentence, agreement through checking is preferred rather than specification, because it allows for the elimination of the pronoun.

It is important to note that the APP is a “soft constraint,” meaning that it may be broken if necessary to maintain the grammaticality of the sentence, hence Picallo’s statement that phi-
features should be as unspecified “as possible.” There may be other grammatical features of the sentence that require the inclusion of a pronoun, as I will show in the analysis below.

Tables 3-6 show which phi-features are realized by prenominal and postnominal possessive pronouns in both Spanish and English, with *bold and italicized* text highlighting the phi-features realized in each instance.

**Table 3: English Prenominal Possessive Pronouns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessor</th>
<th>Possessor agreements</th>
<th>Possessed agreements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singular</td>
<td><em>my</em></td>
<td>+person +number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plural</td>
<td><em>our</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td></td>
<td>+person -number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td></td>
<td>+person +number +gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singular</td>
<td><em>his</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td><em>her</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plural</td>
<td><em>their</em></td>
<td>+person +number -gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Spanish Prenominal Possessive Pronouns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessor</th>
<th>Possessed</th>
<th>Possessor agreements</th>
<th>Possessed agreements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singular</td>
<td></td>
<td>+person +number</td>
<td>-person +number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
<td>-gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singular</td>
<td><em>mi</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+person +number</td>
<td>+person +number +gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
<td>-gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singular</td>
<td><em>nuestro</em></td>
<td>+person +number</td>
<td>-person +number +gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td><em>nuestra</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+person +number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singular</td>
<td><em>nuestros</em></td>
<td>+person +number</td>
<td>-person +number +gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td><em>nuestras</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+person +number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessor</td>
<td>Possessed</td>
<td>Possessor agreements</td>
<td>Possessed agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-----------</td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>mine</td>
<td>+person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>ours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>yours</td>
<td></td>
<td>+person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>+number</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>-gender</td>
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<tr>
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<td>singular</td>
<td>masculine</td>
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<td>+number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feminine</td>
<td>hers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>theirs</td>
<td>+person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: English Postnominal Possessive Pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessor</th>
<th>Possessed</th>
<th>Possessor agreements</th>
<th>Possessed agreements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>+person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mío</td>
<td>+number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>femminine</td>
<td>mía</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>+person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mios</td>
<td>+number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Spanish Postnominal Possessive Pronouns
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>mías</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>nuestro</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>nuestra</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>tuyas</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>tuyas</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>suyas</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Tables 3-6 indicate, possessive pronouns in both Spanish and English always agree in person with the possessor, but never with the possessed, regardless of whether the pronoun is prenominal or postnominal. The differences arise in terms of gender and number agreement. English third-person singular possessive pronouns agree with the possessor in gender and number, again regardless of whether the pronoun appears before or after the noun (Picallo, 1994). In Spanish, however, they agree with the possessed, but whether they agree in gender, number, or both changes with their position. All Spanish possessive pronouns agree
in number with the possessed, regardless of if they are prenominal or postnominal, and all
Spanish postnominal possessive pronouns also agree in gender with the possessed. The
interesting exception, however, is *nuestro/a* and *vuestro/a*, which always agree in both number
and gender whether they appear prenominally or postnominally. This may be due to the fact that,
as Bernstein (2005) suggested, *nuestro/vuestro* are not of the same class of pronouns as the
prenominal possessives *mi/tu/su*.

**Classes of Pronouns.** Bernstein (2005), following Cardinaletti (1998), suggested that
there are three classes of pronouns: strong, weak, and clitic. Cardinaletti had proposed that the
weak and clitic classes may be grouped into one category, deficient pronouns, thus creating a
two-layered categorization as in Figure 3:

![Figure 3: Typology of Pronouns](image)

Bernstein (2005) made the important observation that while both Spanish and English have
strong pronouns, Spanish lacks weak pronouns, while English lacks clitics.

Cardinaletti (1998) offered a typology to distinguish the types of pronouns. She
presented six main characteristics that separate strong and deficient pronouns (Figure 4) and,
within the deficient category, four that separate weak from clitics (Figure 5).
Figure 4: Characteristics of Strong vs. Deficient Pronouns

- Strong pronouns may be focalized; deficient cannot
  - *Su coche vs. El coche suyo*, where bold indicates spoken emphasis
- Strong pronouns may be coordinated; deficient cannot
  - *My and your car vs. The car of yours and mine*
- Strong pronouns cannot move from their initial position; deficient must move
- Strong pronouns must have a human reference; deficient may refer to human or nonhuman
- Strong pronouns can introduce a new referent; deficient cannot
  - “De quien es este coche?” *Es su coche vs. Es suyo*
- Strong pronouns can answer a wh-question; deficient cannot
  - “Whose car is this?” *My vs. Mine.*

Figure 5: Characteristics of Weak vs. Clitic Pronouns

- Clitics move to head position while weak pronouns move to specifier position
- Clitics can double (appear with the referent noun); weak pronouns cannot\(^3\)
  - Note: not all clitics display doubling, but if there is doubling, it must be a clitic. For example, the ungrammaticality of *Su padre de ella does not mean “su” is not a clitic.
- Clitics cannot occur with an article; weak pronouns can
  - *La mi casa, *the my house
- Clitics usually do not agree in gender; weak pronouns do

A preliminary application of the above typologies to Spanish and English would suggest that postnominal possessive pronouns (*mine/yours* and *mío/tuyo/suyo*) are strong pronouns in both languages, while prenominal possessive pronouns take the one deficient form that their respective language has to offer, thus making *my/your/his/hers* weak pronouns and *mi/tu/su* clitics. However, there appear to be exceptions to this, most notably the prenominal *nuestro/a* and *vuestro/a*, as mentioned above, and this thesis will explore this issue in greater detail.

Bosque and Gutiérrez-Rexach (2009) arrived at a similar conclusion, noting that Spanish prenominal possessives behave like clitics. They also noted that while postnominal possessives behave like pronouns in terms of their relationship with the other words, they behave like adjectives in terms of their position in the sentence. I have adopted this analysis for Spanish

\(^3\) Certain dialects do permit doubling of clitics, as in the example *su coche de usted.*
postnominal possessives (such as *suyo*) and will argue that from a syntactic point of view, they behave like adjectives.

This brings up an important point: in traditional grammar, the distribution and use of grammatical elements could change their grammatical categorization. Biber et al. (2002) seemed to subscribe to this theory, since they defined prenominal English possessives as possessive *determiners*, but their postnominal counterparts as possessive *pronouns*. They argued that “pronouns lack the referential content provided by a noun head, and therefore they depend much more on context for their interpretation than determiners” (p.66). Similarly, in Spanish, some traditional grammars would have considered *mi* as an adjective, since it must be used with a noun, whereas *mío* would be considered a pronoun since it can stand alone.

However, linguists such as Zagona (2002) argued that words should be categorized by their properties, not by their use, to provide consistency. Thus, *mío* and *mi* would both be considered pronouns since they have the properties of pronouns (replacing a noun phrase, etc.). Antrim (2003) made a similar argument, using the fact that prenominal possessives are clitics to explain some of their seemingly non-pronominal features (an inability to be coordinated, for example).

Thus, it may seem that minimalism does not permit the classification of postnominal possessives as adjectives; if words must be classified by properties, all possessives should be pronouns regardless of position. However, my analysis will show that it is in fact possible if care is taken to distinguish between the morphological categorization of the postnominal possessive (in which it is still a pronoun) and the syntactic categorization (in which it is an adjective). The analysis section provides further clarification following Figure 14.
The Avoid Pronoun Principle (APP) described above also has implications when deciding which category of pronoun to use in a sentence. In addition to dictating that pronouns be used only when absolutely necessary for specification of phi-features, APP also dictates that if a pronoun is necessary, weak and clitic pronouns should be used before strong pronouns, which would be used only as a “last resort” (if another grammatical requirement necessitated their use). This is because strong pronouns realize more phi-features than do weak and clitic pronouns (see Tables 3-6), and if other syntactic relations have already specified the phi-features, using a strong pronoun would further specify those features and thus violate APP. In essence, APP is an economy principle: use only as many phi-features as are minimally necessary for grammaticality. This second aspect of APP may explain the tendency to use prenominal possessive pronouns, which, as has been demonstrated above, are most likely the weaker form of possessive pronouns in their respective language (weak in English, clitic in Spanish).
Research Question

Considering the information discussed in the literature review, this thesis addresses the following question:

What syntactic constraints govern possessive structures (both pronominal and non-pronominal) in Spanish as compared to English, and how can these structures be explained by the principles of minimalism, checking, cliticization and Case-marking?

Methodology

Since this research did not involve human subjects, the research process did not require approval from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) nor the use of instruments, equipment, or surveys. However, the research was still conducted in accordance with a specific methodology—by following the guidelines of syntactic analysis.

In undertaking syntactic analysis, linguists begin by constructing potential sentences, then consult with native speakers of the language in question to verify whether these sentences are grammatically correct, based on whether the native speakers perceive the construction as natural. For this research, the student served as a native speaker of English, while the advisor served as a native speaker of Spanish. Next, the linguist will attempt to explain the grammaticality (or ungrammaticality) of each construction by using the analyzing mechanisms of the theory they have chosen. This research used the theory of minimalism and the rules that govern syntactic movement, including the principle of shortest movement, the chain uniformity principle, and the economy principle, as explained in the literature review. The following section represents the results of this analysis.
Analysis

It is clear that in both Spanish and English, possessive Θ-roles must be assigned and possessive Case must be checked when possessive constructions are formed. These two operations also must occur in different positions in the syntactic structure, because genitive Case is structural rather than inherent.

Inherent Case depends on a specific Θ-role, as with agentive Case (that is, having an agent, marked by the preposition by) in a passive sentence. In constructions with inherent Case, the Θ-role is assigned and the Case is checked at the same position in the tree. In contrast, structural Case is checked independently of Θ-roles and therefore the two are checked/assigned in separate positions in the tree.

I argue that genitive Case is most likely structural, not inherent, because a genitive pronoun can have different Θ-roles depending on the structure of the sentence. For example, in the phrase *his portrait/su retrato*, the pronoun *his/su* could have three different Θ-roles: owner/possessor (if he owns the portrait), agent (if he created the portrait), and theme (if he is the person depicted in the portrait). The interpretation of the phrase, and the Θ-role assigned to the pronoun, is contextually and structurally determined. Thus, if genitive Case is structural, then in possessive constructions, Θ-roles and Case must be assigned in different positions.

Since very few nouns inherently require possession based on their semantic requirements, the assumption that the possessor noun assigns the possessive Θ-role to the possessed noun seems unlikely. Instead, it appears that it is the functional projections that do the assigning and checking. As mentioned above, it is true that Θ-roles are usually assigned not by a functional projection (i.e., by a position in the tree), but rather by a lexical category (i.e., by a word itself). However, I will argue that possessive Θ-roles are an exception to this rule and may be
understood as a configurational Θ-role. If the presence or absence of a possessive Θ-role has nothing to do with the lexical properties of the noun, it is logical that it is not assigned by a lexical category, but by a functional one.

Therefore, this thesis will follow researchers such as Picallo (1994), Antrim (2003), and Bernstein (2005) to propose that possessive Θ-roles and possessive Case are assigned and checked, respectively, by specific, separate functional projections, which would only be generated in instances of a possessive relationship.

The Functional Projection (henceforth, FP) that assigns the possessive Θ-role will be referred to as a Possessive Phrase (henceforth, PossP). In theory, PossP would always generate the possessor, whether a pronoun or a noun, in its specifier position. Figure 6 shows the structure of this PossP (note that triangles are used when the internal structure of the constituent is not relevant to the discussion):

![Figure 6: Possessive Phrase (PossP)](image)

The syntactic symbol Ø represents an empty category. Although the category itself is empty and will remain empty in all the trees in this analysis, it still must be generated because the PossP must have a phrase head (since all phrases must have heads). Indeed, although it is empty, the category itself is still what assigns the Θ-role of possessor to *Juan.*
While the possessor is generated as a determiner phrase (henceforth, DP), the possessed can never be a DP. This is because the possessed can never be a pronoun; for example, although *you are mine* is grammatical, *my you* is not. It is widely accepted that pronouns replace only full DPs, so if the possessed cannot be a pronoun, this indicates that the possessed also is never a full DP. Thus, in Figure 6 and all subsequent trees, the possessed is generated as an XP, representing an unknown phrase type, to differentiate it from full DPs. The fact that the possessed is never a full DP affects its permitted movement and the definiteness reading it can give a phrase, as will be seen in subsequent figures.

Having assigned the possessive Θ-role, a separate FP would then be generated to check Case, since all NPs require Case to be checked during syntactic movement. This thesis extends an analysis by Bernstein (2005) to argue that an Agreement projection (AgrP) serves this purpose. In Spanish, de would originate in the Agr° position to check Case; in English, -s would do likewise. Figure 7 demonstrates how AgrP would be generated from PossP.

**Figure 7: Generation of AgrP**

As these projections are generated, the various constituents in both languages, such as the possessor, possessed, and the possessive de or ‘s, raise to higher projections. However, the
subsequent movements of these constituents differ between the two languages, and also differs when comparing phrases using nominal possessors with phrases using possessive pronouns.

As in the literature review, this analysis will first discuss the instances where a possessive relationship includes a nominal possessor, including the Spanish example *El coche de Juan* and the English examples *the car of John’s* and *John’s car*. Subsequently, pronominal examples, including both postnominal and prenominal pronouns, will be analyzed. This includes the Spanish examples *su coche*, *el coche suyo*, and *el coche de él*, as well as the English examples *his car* and *the car of his*. Additionally, the Spanish example *nuestro coche* will be examined, since the prenominal pronouns *nuestro* and *vuestra* appear to behave differently from other Spanish prenominal pronouns such as *mi, tu, su*, etc.

**Nominal Possessor Examples**

I begin with a fairly straightforward example: *el coche de Juan*, which clearly demonstrates the syntactic movements described above.

Figure 8: *El coche de Juan*
As Figure 8 shows, Juan originates in the specifier position of the PossP, which will be notated [Spec,PossP]. In this position, Juan receives the possessive Θ-role, assigned by the possessive head. Then, to check the possessive Case, AgrP is generated from PossP, and Juan then raises to [Spec,AgrP]. De then originates in Agr° and subsequently raises to D°. Bernstein (2005) argued that this movement is necessary because the constituent that checks Case eventually needs to be in a position as part of a DP. It seems that D° has a strong feature that forces it to be lexically filled by the movement of de to this position. Finally, el coche raises to [Spec,DP], creating a relationship between [Spec,DP] and de in the determiner position that establishes the definiteness of the entire phrase. (It is crucial to note that it is the relationship that establishes the definiteness of the phrase, because neither de nor el coche carry a definiteness feature in and of themselves since el coche is not a full DP. This is what is meant by the “strong feature” that forces D° to be lexically filled.) Thus, the phrase converges at Logical Form: el coche de Juan.

It should be noted that the movement of el coche to [Spec,DP] violates the shortest movement principle, one of the rules of syntactic movement described in the literature review, because el coche is so far from [Spec,DP] and the noun Juan is a closer candidate for this movement. Since both nouns are definite, the shortest movement principle dictates that Juan should move to [Spec,DP] rather than el coche, which obviously yields an incorrect word order. The movement as conceived in Figure 8 is an example of “nested” movement, where the subject (Juan) raises to the lower projection and the object (el coche) to the higher projection, rather than “crossing” movement, where the opposite occurs.

Murasugi (1992) noted that crossing movement was originally conceived as the only possible movement, but she offered a defense for nested movement as the default pattern in
ergative languages (p. 11). Although Spanish and English are both accusative rather than ergative languages, the defense that Murasugi used for her claim may provide a potential justification for nested movement in this instance. Using the concept of relativized minimality, she argued that “the notion of ‘closest’ at any given level applies to an NP before any movement has taken place at that level” (p. 25). If a constituent has already had its features checked and is not available for further movement, it “does not count as the ‘closest available NP’” (p. 26).

Applying this concept to Figure 8, Juan has already had its Case checked and therefore cannot check the Case of the whole DP, as the constituent that moves to [Spec,DP] must do. Therefore, it is not available for movement and thus, in this instance, nested movement may be justified.

In any event, movement in the English construction the car of John’s is similar to that of el coche de Juan, but with one key distinction: although ‘s does originate in Agr° as does de, it does not raise to D°. Instead, the additional constituent of is necessary to fill D°, as Figure 9 demonstrates:

**Figure 9: The car of John’s**
Like Juan, John receives the possessive Θ-role assigned by the possessive head. AgrP is again generated to check possessive Case, and John then raises to [Spec,AgrP]. Like de, 's originates in Agr°, but unlike de, this 's is a clitic, meaning it cannot raise to D°. To clarify, this is not a clitic pronoun, as discussed above, but a phonological clitic, a constituent that cannot exist independently—it must attach to something else. Clitics may be proclitics, meaning they attach to the front of a constituent, or enclitics, meaning they attach to the back. In this instance, the 's may be defined as a phonological enclitic, meaning that it must attach to the end of the constituent before it (here John). It cannot move independently to raise to D°. However, D° cannot remain empty because of its strong feature. As with el coche in Figure 8, the car is not a full DP and must be in relationship with another constituent to establish the definiteness of the phrase. Since 's cannot move to fill D°, of is inserted in D° to create that relationship and allow the sentence to converge at Logical Form.

The second English example, John's car, follows a different pattern, as Figure 10 shows:

**Figure 10: John's car**
Initially, the movement is the same: *John* receives the possessive Ø-role assigned by the possessive head, AgrP is again generated to check possessive Case, and *John* then raises to [Spec,AgrP]. The phonological enclitic ‘s originates in Agr° and once again does not raise to fill D°, since it must attach to *John*. In this instance, however, D° does remain empty, because the definiteness of the phrase is established by moving the entire AgrP to [Spec,DP].

This movement of the entire AgrP occurs because there is no determiner with the possessed (*car* rather than *the car* in Figure 9). Bare nouns in English are usually not interpreted as definite, and therefore the possessed cannot move to [Spec,DP] by itself in order to establish the definiteness of the phrase. *John* cannot move to [Spec,DP], as it has already had its Case assigned and is therefore not available for further movement (see Murasugi, 1992). Since neither the possessor nor the possessed can move to [Spec,DP] to establish definiteness, it is necessary to move the entire AgrP in order to do so.

Even though there is no determiner with the possessed, and even though D° remains empty, *John’s car* is still understood to be definite, equivalent to *the car of John’s* rather than *some car of John’s* or *a car of John’s*. This is possible because moving the entire AgrP offers the option to use the possessor noun, rather than the possessed noun, to establish definiteness. The definite reading of *John* “percolates” to the rest of the DP, giving the entire phrase a definite reading. And, because *John* is a full DP, unlike *car*, it can establish that definiteness on its own, without needing to form a relationship with another constituent such as *of* in Figure 9. Therefore, D° can remain empty, because there is no need for it to be lexically filled if the possessor has already established definiteness.

**Pronominal Possessor Examples**
Having considered the previous examples with nominal possessors, I now turn to several examples in which this category is filled by a pronoun. These examples include the prenominal *su coche, his car*, and the exceptional *nuestro coche*, as well as the postnominal *the car of his, el coche suyo, and el coche de él*.

One important result of using a pronominal possessor rather than a nominal one is that pronouns have overt Case, meaning that the Case-marking constituents *de* and *'s* are not necessary. To explain the distinction more clearly: Overt Case-marking is the representation of Case through the insertion of some morphological or syntactic category. Morphological Case-marking would be used with pronouns (for example, *mi/tu/su or his/hers*), while syntactic Case-marking would be used with nouns (for example, *de* in *el coche de Juan*). (Note that some sources may refer to “synthetic” vs “analytical” Case-marking rather than morphological vs. syntactic. The concepts are the same: synthetic Case-marking uses one lexical unit, such as a pronoun, to mark Case, while analytical uses several lexical units.) While all NPs require Case to be checked, it is only necessary to mark Case when the possessor NP does not demonstrate overt Case. When the possessor NP is a pronoun, as in this instance, syntactic or analytical Case-marking is not necessary because the pronoun already carries morphological (or synthetic) Case-marking. Thus, there is no need to have a constituent generated in Agr°, as with *de* and *'s* in the examples where the possessor was an NP.

Although no constituent is generated in Agr°, in Spanish, the position does not remain empty, because the possessed noun (*coche*) raises to Agr°. Figure 11 demonstrates this:
Because the possessor is a pronoun (su), syntactic Case-marking is not necessary, meaning that de is not generated in Agr. To fill this empty position, the possessed (coche) raises to Agr°, which must happen in order to get su and coche in a spec-head relationship to check the phi-feature of number through agreement. As mentioned in the literature review, agreement is only one way that identification of phi-features can occur (the other being specification), but in this instance, specification cannot be used since the number feature inherent in su refers to the possessed, not the possessor. For example, in the sentences María puso su coche en el garaje and María puso sus coches en el garaje, the pronoun su becomes sus not due to a change in the possessor, but a change in the number of the possessed. This means that the number phi-feature must be checked through agreement between the pronoun and the possessed noun, which can only take place when the two are in a spec-head relationship. Therefore, coche raises to Agr° (which must occur before the second raising of su).

The situation is different in English, however, as Figure 12 shows:
Once again, no constituent is generated in Agr° since the use of the pronoun *his* as the possessor eliminates the need for syntactic Case-marking. However, the XP *car*, unlike *coche*, does not move to Agr°—that category remains empty. This is possible because in English, the possessor pronoun does not agree with the possessed noun. For example, the possessor pronoun *his* remains the same in the phrases *his car* and *his cars*, although the plurality differed between the possessed objects. Since that agreement does not need to be established, unlike in Spanish, *his* and *car* do not eventually need to be in a spec-head relationship. Therefore, *car* remains as the complement of PossP.

Additionally, English differs from Spanish in that *his* does not subsequently raise to the D° position, as does *su*. Rather, the entire AgrP moves to [Spec,DP], as with *John’s car* in Figure 10. This is because *su* is a clitic, while *his* is a weak pronoun (since English pronouns are never clitics). As mentioned in Figure 5, clitics move to head position while weak pronouns move to specifier position, and thus *his* cannot move to D°. However, since [Spec,DP] must be filled in...
order to establish the definiteness of the phrase, the only option is to move the entire AgrP to [Spec,DP], as seen in Figure 12.

Movement of the entire AgrP to establish definiteness is also justified by the fact that, just as with John’s car, the possessed noun car lacks a determiner, and bare nouns in English are usually not interpreted as definite. Thus, moving car by itself cannot establish the definiteness of the phrase. Since neither constituent can move by itself to establish definiteness (his cannot due to syntactic constraints, and car cannot due to lack of definiteness in itself), it is necessary to move the entire AgrP in order to do so. Once the AgrP has been moved, just as with John’s car, the definiteness of the possessive pronoun percolates to the rest of the DP, giving the entire phrase a definite reading.

Interestingly, the Spanish prenominal possessive pronouns nuestro and vuestro follow this English model of moving the entire AgrP, rather than simply moving the pronoun to D°, as occurs with su. Figure 13 demonstrates this with nuestro coche:

Figure 13: Nuestro coche
In reality, *nuestro coche* shows an amalgamation of the Spanish and English patterns. Before the entire AgrP moves to [Spec,DP] as in the English pattern of *his car*, the possessed (*coche*) does raise to Agr\(^{\alpha}\), as in the Spanish pattern of *su coche*, to create a spec-head relationship and trigger the agreement between possessed and pronoun. In the example of *su coche*, this movement served only to check the phi-feature of number, but *nuestro* shows gender agreement as well as number (nuestra pluma, for example). My analysis does not definitively conclude whether both of these agreement features are satisfied by the same spec-head relationship, or whether an additional functional projection is generated to check the gender phi-feature. Regardless, the similarity to the Spanish pattern ends here, as the entire AgrP raises to [Spec,DP] rather than simply moving the pronoun *nuestro*.

This similarity to the English pattern indicates that *nuestro* and *vuestro*, although they are prenominal possessive pronouns like *su*, are not clitics. This argument is supported by the Avoid Pronoun Principle (APP) as stated by Picallo (1994). For example, clitics are underspecified for number (i.e., *su* is used for both singular and plural possessors), but *nuestro* and *vuestro* are not, since they change to *nuestros/vuestros* when the possessed is plural. Furthermore, *nuestro* and *vuestro* also agree in gender with the noun (e.g., *nuestro coche* vs. *nuestra casa*), indicating that they carry more morphological weight than a possessive clitic. Finally, of all possessive pronouns in Spanish, *nuestro* and *vuestro* are the only ones that do not change form no matter whether they appear in prenominal or postnominal position. For example, *su* becomes *suyo* when moved to postnominal position, *mi* becomes *mío*, etc., yet *nuestro* and *vuestro* take the same form in both positions, again suggesting that they cannot be of the same class of pronouns as the prenominal clitics *mi/tu/su*. Because Spanish does not include weak pronouns, and because Picallo (1994) stated that strong pronouns must appear postnominally (p. 259-260), the logical
analysis is to assume that *nuestro* and *vuestro* are strong pronouns. This exceptional categorization of *nuestro* and *vuestro* provides a potential explanation for the difficulties encountered by some Spanish students who incorrectly use the clitic pronoun *nos* in place of *nuestro*, which will be discussed in the conclusion.

Although the previous pronominal examples have focused on possessive pronouns in prenominal position, this analysis will conclude by examining two postnominal pronoun constructions, *the car of his* and *el coche suyo*. Figure 14 demonstrates the English construction, which is derived in a manner very similar to the postnominal possessor example *the car of John’s* seen in Figure 9.

**Figure 14: The car of his**

The difference between Figure 14 (*the car of his*) and Figure 9 (*the car of John’s*) is that the phonological enclitic ‘s is not generated in Agr°. The end result is the same, however, because in Figure 9, the ‘s could not raise to D° and establish definiteness, forcing the generation of of in D°. The same occurs here, since now there is nothing to be moved from Agr°.
In Spanish, however, the situation is more complex. The construction \textit{el coche suyo} is more distinct from its counterpart \textit{el coche de Juan} (Figure 8) because the postnominal pronoun \textit{suyo} is not in fact a pronoun, but rather behaves like an adjective, meaning that it does not require Case to be checked. As mentioned in the Literature Review, minimalism does permit the possibility that these postnominal possessives can remain pronouns when defined morphologically, but, because they are being generated in adjective position in the derivation, they behave syntactically as adjectives.

Support for this adjectival analysis may be seen in the fact that Spanish permits phrases such as \textit{lo mío}, as in \textit{Donde está lo mío?} (\textit{where is mine?}). The \textit{lo} construction is typically used with adjectives, not with nouns; for example, *\textit{lo coche} is ungrammatical. If \textit{mío} (and the similar \textit{tuyo}, \textit{suyo}, etc.) can appear with the \textit{lo} construction, it implies that they are not pronouns, but rather adjectives. This may also explain why only strong possessives are permitted in postnominal constructions; strong pronouns realize more phi-features than weak and clitic pronouns, and any pronoun behaving as another syntactic category should realize as many phi-features as possible to match that category. Because Spanish adjectives display gender and number agreement, the pronouns appearing in adjective position should also realize phi-features for gender and number to match, which Spanish postnominal possessives do (see Table 6).

Since adjectives are not arguments but predicates (they describe an argument rather than referring to the argument through phi-features), they do not receive Case. Therefore, if the postnominal possessives are behaving as adjectives, the AgrP would not need to be generated.\footnote{This also explains why \textit{de} is not used in constructions with pronominal possessive pronouns; because AgrP is not generated, $D^o$ does not need to be lexically filled, thus, \textit{de} is not necessary.} This would result in a very different construction from those presented in this thesis, with the generation of different FPs, and is therefore beyond the scope of the present analysis.
As a final note, Spanish does allow another possessive construction using postnominal pronouns in addition to *el coche suyo: the phrase *el coche de él. Although a tree will not be presented for this construction since its syntactic derivation is completely parallel to *el coche de Juan (Figure 8), it is worth mentioning here because it shows another interesting difference between the available constructions in Spanish vs. English. *El coche de él has the postnominal pronoun in the nominative Case, which is not possible in English: *the car of his takes the accusative Case, and nominative constructions such as *the car of he would be ungrammatical. Again, detailed analysis of these differences lies beyond the scope of the present analysis but is worthwhile to mention as a potential direction for future research.

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5 Interestingly, however, the nominative postnominal construction in Spanish is only available for third-person pronouns: *el coche de tú or *el coche de yo would be ungrammatical.
Conclusion

In the above examples, I have demonstrated the many ways to form possessive constructions in English and Spanish, using pronominal and nominal possessors in either prenominal or postnominal position. While both languages permit pronominal possessors to appear prenominally or postnominally, Spanish does not permit nominal possessors in prenominal position, and this difference from English served as the catalyst for my research. My thesis shows that though the above examples are diverse, they can all be understood through one uniform analysis; namely, that possessive Θ-roles and possessive Case are assigned and checked by specific, separate functional projections only generated in instances of a possessive relationship. Although the constituents, their grammatical categorization and their movements may vary, the functional projections (AgrP and PossP) are generated in each instance to create the same core structure. Through the analysis I have proposed, it is apparent that although Spanish and English possessive constructions may differ significantly at first sight, their syntactic structures in fact follow similar patterns.

This study offers many potential directions for future research, particularly surrounding exceptional constructions such as *el coche suyo* and *nuestro coche*. As mentioned in my analysis, *nuestro* appears to be a strong pronoun rather than a clitic, while *suyo* and its fellow postnominal Spanish pronouns appear to function as adjectives in possessive constructions. The timeline and scope of the present study did not allow for either of these exceptions to be examined in greater detail; however, both are excellent topics for subsequent researchers to pursue. In particular, the adjectival analysis of *suyo* leads neatly into ongoing debates of whether words should be categorized by their distribution and use or by their properties. As indicated in the Literature Review, I argue that a compromise is possible in which postnominal possessives are
morphologically pronouns but syntactically behaving as adjectives; further researchers may expand upon this idea to add to the ongoing discussion.

The present research holds many implications both for linguists and for anyone who works with the languages of Spanish and English. For example, translators and interpreters will benefit from this detailed analysis of the available constructions in both languages and the reasons why each example is or is not permitted. Spanish teachers may also benefit from my conclusions, particularly my analysis of *nuestro* as a strong pronoun instead of a clitic like its fellow prenominal Spanish pronouns *mi, tu* and *su*. Students of Spanish often exhibit a characteristic error pattern in which they substitute the clitic pronoun *nos* when *nuestro* should in fact be used (for example, *nos coche* rather than *nuestro coche*). My analysis provides a potential explanation for their difficulties: these students have unconsciously internalized the pattern than clitics are used in prenominal constructions, since in all other examples in both Spanish and English, the weakest available pronoun is what appears prenominally. Spanish teachers may take note of this as an area that they should emphasize when introducing students to possessive pronouns.

Finally, the uniform analysis I have proposed offers distinct advantages to linguists in understanding the linguistic relationship between Spanish and English possessive constructions, as it shows that the morphological and semantic properties of the words themselves are the key factor in any differences that arise between the various constructions. One of the core goals of minimalism is to reduce syntactic derivations to their simplest form, allowing for a clearer analysis of the properties of the words and their effects on the derivation. Therefore, the present research offers a valuable contribution to the field of linguistics and particularly to future researchers of Spanish-English derivations and their differences, by demonstrating that what may
appear to be a profound difference in structure may in fact be a profound similarity at the syntactic level. This new perspective may add one more piece of evidence to the theory of universal grammar and the underlying similarity of all languages, which — similarly to the humans who speak them — are perhaps more alike than they are different, after all.
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