

Conference Paper

The Relationship of Possessor and Possessed in German

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Abstract

The relationship of possessor and possessed in German involve the aspects of the structure and meaning. The aspects of structure in terms of possessive construction are the internal noun phrases (NP) and the predicates used. The possessive constructions of the internal NP show the possessive relationship in German like *Ulis Vater, das Dach des Hauses, die Tasche von Katrin* and so on, as well as the behavior of the verbs *haben* and *gehören* like *Eva hat ein Auto* and *das Buch gehört Ihm*. Another interesting thing is to assess the type of possessive relationship based on the construction and semantic aspect, such as *ownership, kinship relationship, whole-part relationship* etc. This paper is intended to see the possessive relations and their constructions in German.

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The terminology of possession in language studies is used to express a fairly broad relationship. Every language has possessive construction which is expressed through noun phrases (NP), such as *the car's door* or *the color of the house* in English. As a language with a case system, beside the use of certain verbs and NP, possessive constructions in German are expressed through genitive case, such as *die Frau des Bürgermeisters* 'the wife of the major' and *die Sprache der Jugendlichen* 'language of young people'. There are several cross-language variations that relate to the type of person or animal or things that can be a **possessor** (R), and which type is **possessed** (D), and what kind of ownership relationship is involved. In this paper there will also be shown some formal markers on **R** or on **D** or on both **R** and **D** or there is no marker at all. The data in German language will show the type of relationship and their possessive markers.

The study of the **possessor** and **possessed** does not only involve the structure but also the meaning of the relationship. In German, the possessive constructions in NP can be expressed, for example, with R + s D (*Evas Buch*), or D von R (*das Buch von Eva*), or D genitiv R (*das Spiel des Kindes*), or possessive pronouns D (*meine Nachbarin*), as well as predictive R + haben + D (*Sie hat eine Katze*), and D+gehören+R (*die*

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Tasche gehört mir). It will in this paper be discussed the relationship of **possessor** and **possessed** from the the aspects of structure and meaning. The possessive relationship shown by the constructions is quite varied and wide. Not all of these constructions show the same meaning of ownership. Dixon (2010: 262) categorizes ownership relations into seven types, namely a) ownership, b) overall-part relationship; c) kinship relationship; d) attributes; e) orientation or location; f) association; and g) nominalisation.

The terminology of possession in German is known as *Zugehörigkeitsadjektiv* or *Bezugsadjektiv*, that is an adjective class that has a process of flexion and express a relationship or an ownership between the basic morpheme and the noun it refers to (Bußmann, 2002: 123). Furthermore, it was stated that the owner of the property was clearly seen in the construction of the NP using possessive pronouns such as *ich/mein*, *er/sein* and so on. According to Helbig-Buscha (2005:235), the possessive pronoun refers to possessions in the narrow and broader sense (affiliation and interest, etc.) The possessive pronoun is derived from the genitive of personal pronouns. Each possessive pronoun corresponds to a personal pronoun.

Ich-mein 'I-my'; *wir unser* 'we-our'

Du-dein 'you-your'; *ihr-euer* 'you-your'; *Sie-Ihr* 'you-your'

Er-sein 'he-his'; *sie-ihe* 'she-her'; *es-sein* 'it-its'

The possessive pronouns are mostly used as an article word. The following basic rule applies: (1) in the root word, the pronoun is based on the person, gender, and number of the possessor, and (2) the endings on case, gender, and number of possessed as seen in the following sentence.

Ich brauche kein Feuerzeug. Ich nehme meines. 'I do not need a lighter. I take mine.'

The relationship of possessor and possessed in German discussed in this paper refers to the type of ownership relationship based on Dixon as stated before. Here are some examples of German language data that represent various types of ownership relationships.

A. Ownership

1. **Evas Auto fährt langsam.** 'Eva's car is running slowly.'
2. *Wir verlassen unser Haus, wenn wir es nicht mehr bezahlen können.* 'We left our house when we could no longer rent it.'

B. Overall-part relationship (can be a part of a human body or animal or part of an object)

(3) *Die Zähne von Inge tun weh.* 'Inge's teeth hurt'

(4) *Die Tür des Autos kann man nicht schließen.* 'The car's door can't be closed.'

C. Kinship relationship (can be a blood or marriage relationship)

(5) *Meine Mutter ist gestorben.* 'My mother is dead.'

(6) *Der Mann von Ute arbeitet bei einer Bank.* 'Ute's husband works in a Bank.'

D. Attributes (of a person, animal, or things)

(7) *Das Benehmen von Franz ist schlecht.* 'Franz's behavior is bad.'

(8) *Das Alter von der Fossil ist ungekannt.* 'The age of the fossil is unknown.'

E. A statement of orientation or location

(9) *Die vordere Seite des Autos ist kaputt.* 'The front side of the car is broken.'

(10) *Innerhalb der Stadt ist momentan voll von Leuten.* 'In the middle of the city is now full of people.'

F. Association

(11) *Hans Arzt wohnt in Hamburg.* 'Han's doctor lives in Hamburg.'

(12) *Das Dorf von Julia ist durch den Ausbruch des Vulkans zerstört worden.* 'The village of Julia was damaged by a volcanic eruption.'

G. Nomination, which can relate to an object, location, or activity etc.

(13) *Die Erfindung von Dr. Meier war sehr interessant.* 'Dr Meier's discovery is very interesting.'

1. Type of Possessive Relationship in the NP

There are three central semantic relationships which are covered by an NP-internal grammatical construction of possession, namely (1) ownership, (2) whole-part relationship, and (3) kinship relationship, illustrated for German (1-6). Due to the limited space, the possessive relationships discussed in this paper are also limited to these three groups. They have a relative different character.

1.1. Ownership

Sentences (1) *Evas Auto fährt langsam* shows that in the social environment, where Eva lives, it is known that Eva (the R) has a power over her car (the D). This can mean that she has a full ownership, she can drive the car and she can also sell it. Or it can also mean that Eva has a temporary possession. When the car is leased to her, she could drive the car, but she could not sell it. While in (2) *Wir verlassen unser Haus wenn es es nicht mehr mieten können* the possessive relationship at the NP *unser Haus* 'our house' states that R does not have full power over the house, because when R is no longer able to rent it, R must leave the house (D).

1.2. Whole-part relationship

Here the 'whole' is marked as R (possessor) and 'part' is marked as D (possessed). In some languages, this possessive construction is only used for parts of the human body such as in (3) *Die Zähne von Inge* 'Inge's teeth'. In other languages the possessive relationship can be extended to apply to parts of animals such as *der Schwanz der Katze* 'the cat's tail' or things *die Tür des Auto* 'car doors'.

1.3. Kinship relationship

There are two subdivisions related to this kinship relationship, namely the relationship of blood and relationship due to the marriage or also known as affinal relationship. First, a possessive relationship that shows the blood relationship between R and D caused by birth, for example *meine Mutter* 'my mother' or *der Großvater von Uli*. This relationship always shows reciprocal relationships. If Silvia is Stefan's mother (*Stefans Mutter*), then Stefan is the son Silvia (*der Sohn von Silvia*) and so on. For two people in such a reciprocal possessive relationships like this, they can be either R or D depending

on the structure of the NP. *Second*, the relationship due to marriage such as *der Mann von Ute* 'the husband of Ute' or *Schwiegermutter von Katrin* 'mother-in-law of Katrin'. In this possessive relationship there is also a reciprocal relationship, for example, if *Paul ist Lisas Mann* 'Paul is Lisa's husband' then *Lisa ist Pauls Frau* 'Lisa is Paul's wife'. Likewise with *Susan ist die Schwiegermutter von Max* 'Susan is Max' mother-in-law, then *Max ist der Schwiegersohn von Susan* 'Max is Susan's son-in-law.'

From the three types of possessive relationships above, there is one equation that is seen in its grammatical features, namely through the internal possessive construction of NP. All possessors of the three types can be marked with R, and those that belong to D cannot be the R.

This possessive construction through internal-NP can be extended to mark other types of relationships such as attributes, orientation/location, and associations as shown by the data in the previous section. The construction of NP with the prepositions *von* 'of' does not always show a possessive relationship, as in *Die Karte bekomme ich von meinem Vater*. 'I got the ticket from my father'. The preposition *von* 'of/from' in the above sentence does not state possessive relationships but purely function as a preposition followed by dative cases which have the meaning *from*.

2. Predicative Possessive Construction

In addition to the internal possessive construction of the NP, the German language also recognizes other constructions that state ownership relations, namely through predicative possessive construction. In German, the construction is shown by the verbs *haben* 'to have' and *gehören* 'belong to'. The argument that occupies the subject in possessive construction with the verbs *haben* is R. D occupies the position of objects.

(14) *Eva hat ein Auto*. 'Eva has a car.'

(15) *Wir haben ein Haus*. 'We have a house.'

A different behavior is shown by the verb *gehören* 'belong to'. R is owned by the object and in this case occurred in a dative case and D occupies the subject position in a nominative case.

(16) *Das Haus gehört uns*. 'The house is ours.'

(17) *Das Buch gehört mir*. 'That book is mine.'

Das Haus which functions as a subject in (15) is not an R in the construction that uses the verb *gehören*, but D. While *uns* is the R and functions as a dative object in this sentence.

In possessive construction with internal-NP as shown by sentences (1) - (12), the type of ownership is assumed to be generally known information, such as sentence (4) *Die Tür des Autos* 'the door of the car', obviously the car has a door. Similarly in sentence (6) *Der Mann von Ute* 'the husband of Ute', it is understood that Ute has a husband, and so on.

Let's go back to the predicative possessive construction with the verb *haben* 'to have'. Apparently, the possessive construction with this verb is used for statements about significant reality. For example, not everyone has children, so the following sentence is semantically acceptable.

(18) *Susan hat einen Sohn.* 'Susan has a son.'

The speaker will not use the constructions with the verb *haben* to explain the ownership or attributes that every possessor hopes to have. In normal situations, it is rarely said that *Julia hat einen Vater* 'Julia has a father' or *Lisa hat Zähne* 'Lisa has teeth'. Those sentences are grammatically correct but semantically it can still be discussed, because logically everyone has both father and teeth. But it will sound logical if the sentences are added with other elements or information, so that the construction with the verb *haben* becomes (semantically) acceptable. The sentences below show the possessive construction with the added information.

(19) *Julia hat einen **reichen** Vater.* 'Julia has a rich father.'

(20) *Julia hat einen Vater **im Gefängnis.*** 'Julia's father is in prison.'

(21) *Lisa hat **keine** Zähne.* 'Lisa doesn't have teeth.'

(22) *Lisa hat **noch** Zähne.* 'Lisa still has teeth.' (While others of the same age do not have teeth anymore).

The sentence *Julia hat einen Vater* sounds more logical with the addition of an information *reichen* 'rich' (19) and *im Gefängnis* 'in prison' (20). And so is the sentence *Lisa hat Zähne* which is expanded by adding *keine* 'no' as in sentence (21) and *noch* 'still' in sentence (22). The same thing is shown by the sentence *Hans hat ein Benehmen* 'Hans has a behavior'. Of course everyone has his/her own behavior, therefore this sentence needs to be added with other information such as an adjective *schlecht* 'bad' to make it more acceptable semantically and it turns to a more logical sentence, such as *Hans hat ein **schlechtes** Benehmen* 'Hans has a bad temper'.

3. Conclusion

The German possessive construction that shows the relationship between possessor and possessed can be identified from 1) the internal-NP such as *Ulis Lehrerin* 'Uli's teacher', *mein Buch* 'my book', *die Farbe des Autos* 'the color of the car (genitive), and *die Tochter von Lisa* 'the daughter of Lisa', and 2) the verbs used, namely the verb *haben* 'to have' and *gehören* 'belong to' on level of clause or sentence. But the arguments of both verbs have different function from R and D. From the semantic aspect, possessive relationships that emerge from the construction are quite diverse, including showing absolute ownership relationships, kinship relationships, parts of the body or parts of things, attributes and so on. The classification of possessive relationships depends on the meaning of the word used and the possessive construction chosen. Many sentences are commonly known as correct grammatically, but not semantically. And therefore, it is needed additional information to make them sound logical.

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