The process of grammaticalisation in the adnominal possessive dative construction in the German dialect of Deutschpilsen (Hungary)

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1. Abstract

Adnominal possessive datives occur in many Germanic languages and its German variants have been widely researched (e.g. Zifonun 2003, Ramat 1986). The present poster explores this structure in a German dialect of Hungary, the dialect of Deutschpilsen, described by Márkus (2014). The two main aspects to be focused on: (i) grammaticalisation of the possessive pronoun; (ii) the discourse functional status of the structure, as a justification for its existence. A significant fact about the distribution of possessive constructions in the dialect is that other coexisting forms are also available and attested. If we maintain the principle that language is economical, these grammatical realisations must differ in certain aspects.

2. Introduction

The village of Deutschpilsen is a settlement from the Middle Ages. Earlier, the inhabitants earned their living from mining, and came from southern (Tyrol, Styria) and mid-eastern regions (the Hungarian-Magyar part of the German language territory). This is indicated by the analysis of linguistic data on phonetic, grammatical, lexical and syntactic layers, on the basis of which the language is identified as a Southern Bavarian - Southern Middle Bavarian - Eastern Middle German mixed dialect. The finding is further supported by the fact that in these two areas, itinerant mining experts worked, who migrated to mining regions where new pits were opened.

3. Adnominal possessive constructions in the dialect

Three types of possessive constructions with fronted possessor can be distinguished:

(i) possessive datives followed by a possessive pronoun of the possessum:
(1) in kindertahr li Spial (=den Kindern ihr Spiel)
the.dat that her boy 
‘the children’s toy’

(ii) possessive datives with a possessive pronoun instead of the possessum:
(2) in dem Vater sein Hut
the.dat that her hat
‘the hat of the father’

(iii) possessive datives with a possessive pronoun of the type (3):
(3) in die Tasche die Tasche
the.dat bag the pocket
‘the pocket of the bag’

The fronted possessor part of the phrase may represent a disintegrated topical element. Similar forms of fronting or dislocation are widely attested across languages and play a significant role as a means of thematicisation in spoken informal German. The possessor noun bears no case marking in the above example, which points to a hypothetical base structure for the prepositional possessive construction: the unconnected possessor precedes the possessive pronoun + head sequence, while the pronoun connects the possessor syntactically and semantically to the rest of the phrase. We can observe a similar state of affairs in German Hanging Topic Left Dislocation: ‘Der Mann, seine Jacke ist ganz schmutzig.’ (Zifonun 2003: 114).

4. Grammaticalisation of the possessive pronoun

4.1. Cases of mismatch between grammatical and referential gender in the possessive construction type (i)

In sum, the pronoun ir (=‘hir’) acquires a new meaning in the dialect, i.e. ‘belonging to’ instead of ‘belonging to her’ (cf. Zifonun 2003: 108). It loses semantic features in order to express a grammatical relation – this points to the fact that a process of grammaticalisation affecting the possessive pronoun in the construction has already begun.

5. Information structure

It is argued that the trigger for the formation of the adnominal dative possessive construction lies in the realm of information structure. The construction is a means of grammatically separating the possessor to fulfill its discourse functional role as a topical noun.

6. Bibliography


http://www.syhd.info/apps/atlas/index.html#neutrale-kongruenzformen

