

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 Ore Mountains) 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. This 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** **kʰindən** **ir** **ʃpiəl** (=den Kindern ihr Spiel)
 the.dat children their toy
 'the children's toy'

The dative is not directly adjacent to the head noun but it is connected to it via the possessive pronoun (compare Zifonun 2003: 121). Zifonun (2005: 25) calls this structure an *analytic possessor construction* ('analytische Possessorkonstruktion'): dative (possessor) + possessive pronoun + head noun (possessum).

(ii) **adnominal possessives in nominative** ('nominativus pendens' in Ramat 1986):

- (2) **di** **tjər** **i(ə)r** **vailn** (=die Tür ihre Klinke)
 the.nom door her handle
 'the handle of the door'

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 thematisation in spoken informal German.) The possessor noun bears no case marking in the above example, which points to a hypothetical base structure for the dative 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).

(iii) **adnominal possessives with the definite article** of the type (3):

- (3) **ida** **tāšn** **də** **žəb** (=der Tasche die Tasche)
 the.dat bag the pocket
 'the pocket of the bag'

In this third case, the possessum is accompanied by a definite article or by a preposition+definite article sequence instead of a possessive pronoun. Moreover, if a preposition has to appear in the structure, this type with the definite article is preferred over the ones with the pronoun. There are also instances with the reverse ordering of the possessor and the possessum, e.g. in (4), where the dative possessor sits in the postverbal field and the possessum in the middle field of the clause. Thus, the two nominal elements of the construction ('die Füße des Mannes') may also appear discontinuously.

- (4) **I** **hob** **di** **Vias** **kseɣn** **im** **Ma**. (=die Füße ... dem Mann)
 I have the feet seen the.dat man
 'I have seen the man's feet.'

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 topic.

- (6) a. [_{DP} das Ohr [_{des Kindes}]]_{TOP} or [_{DP} das Ohr]_{TOP} [_{des Kindes}]
 b. *[[_{DP} das Ohr [_{des Kindes}]]]

In a genitive construction (6) only the head (possessum) can function as topic, the possessor is too much embedded in the structure to have an information-structural role. The dative possessive structure puts the possessor in a syntactically less embedded, adjoined position where its topicality is enabled. The construction is a means of grammatically separating the possessor to fulfill its discourse functional role as a topic or contrastive topic.

- (7) [_{TOP} **Im Kind**]_i [_{des} **Əur** **t**]_i ist pluətig gbest. ('The child's ear was bloody.')

The interpretation of this clause diverges from one with a genitive construction: the child is what the sentence is about, it is emphasized that something happened to him/her.

From this information structural aspect, the adnominal dative constructions demonstrates a certain similarity to Left Dislocation and Split Topicalisation as well.

Split Topicalisation, as in (8), is a means of separating constituents of a DP that bear conflicting discourse features.

- (8) a. **gebrauchte** **Fahrräder**
 used bikes
 FOCUS ← TOPIC
- b. **Fahrräder** kauft er immer **[gebrauchte t_i]**.
 TOPIC FOCUS/NEW*

*Different distributions of discourse features are also argued for in the literature (e.g. Ott 2012), this example demonstrates the most common state of affairs.

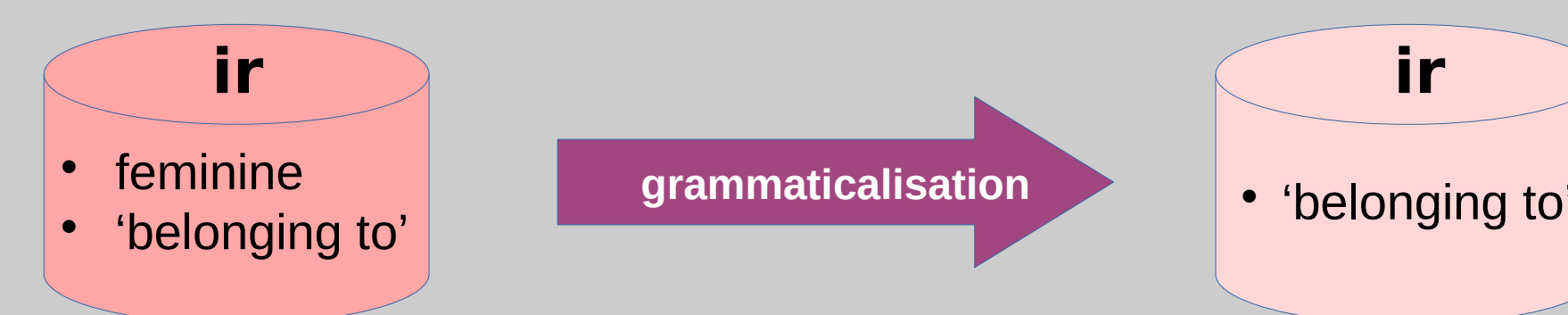
4. Grammaticalisation of the possessive pronoun

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

- (5) **in** **hoz** **iər** **gartn**
 the.dat house her garden
 'the garden of the house'

In such instances, the feminine possessive pronoun (*iər*, *ir*) refers to masculine or neutral possessors. The data point to the fact that the process of grammaticalisation might be at work here.

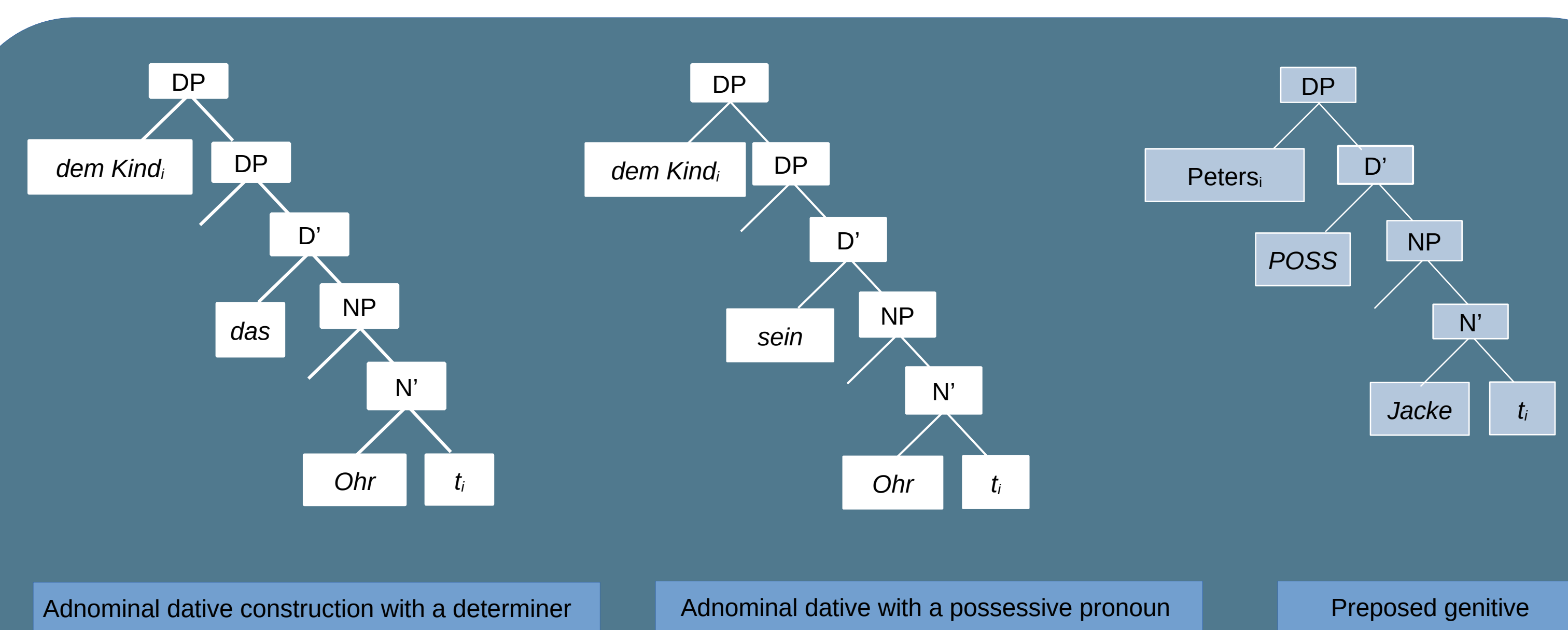
The cases of incongruence found in the literature all share the feature that the possessive pronoun *sein* is applied leading to incongruence in gender, i.e. the antecedents are feminine possessors in all cases. In contrast, the data from Deutschpilsen demonstrate the exact opposite: the possessive item '*ir*' (= 'ihr') occurs as referring to masculine and neutral possessors, as in example (5). Incongruence never shows up with feminine possessors and the masculine form of the possessive pronoun is never used in an incongruent way.



4.2. A possible explanation

The possessive pronoun *sein/ihr* expresses a relationship between the referent of the head noun and another contextually identifiable object (*er/Sie/es*). The pronoun incorporates the description of the possessor; the identity of this person follows from the linguistic context, which presents the antecedent. This means that referring back to the possessor happens twice, without any semantic necessity. Therefore, semantic information about the possessor incorporated in the pronoun is superfluous, it could also be neglected semantically, its sole function being the indication of a (possessive) relationship between the dative NP and the head noun (Zifonun 2003: 106-107). Because of the adjacency of the possessor, gender congruence becomes redundant as a consequence and might be neutralized as well, the indication of a possessive relationship being the only objective.

In sum, the pronoun *ir* (= 'ihr') 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.



6. Bibliography

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