
THE POSSESSOR THAT APPEARS TWICE VARIATION, STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF POSSESSIVE DOUBLING IN GERMAN

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0 ◻ INTRODUCTION

Like modern Greenbergian typology, traditional dialectology has assumed a functional perspective in its morphosyntactic research. In this view, syntactic doubling phenomena in dialects have been mostly understood as means of extending either clearness (*Deutlichkeit*) and/or emphasis (*Nachdruck*). At the beginning of the 20th century, Oskar Weise – a distinct expert in dialect syntax – found a connection between the occurrence of doubling phenomena such as DP-internal possessor constructions, the topic of my talk, and the intention of dialect speakers to increase clearness and emphasis.¹ As long as we are concerned with a descriptive level, this functional perspective has its merits and is justified: in the field of dialect syntax, there are many older studies which have revealed plenty of very interesting data.

Yet, functional explanations of this kind cannot be the whole story, because they only take surface structures into consideration. If we really want to understand why doubling occurs in dialects, we should try to detect the underlying structures and we should attempt to identify the function of doubling. Only an investigation of this kind could result in an explanation in a deeper sense. Sometimes, though not always, it will reveal that doubling is not doubling at all, at least at certain levels of the syntactic system, or that the function of doubling is different from what is commonly assumed.

My paper consists of three parts: in the first part I will present data that are for the most part taken from various German dialects, showing a certain range of variation in several respects; in the second part I am going to argue that double marking is by no means redundant, as is commonly assumed; and in the third part I will draw some conclusions concerning lessons we can learn from the study of syntactic doubling phenomena.

1 ◻ DPIP: THE DATA

In colloquial and dialectal German, a possessive construction occurs which shows a kind of double marking on the morphological level: the combination of a prenominal, DP-internal

¹ „vor allem aber ist sein Streben auf Deutlichkeit gerichtet. [...] Die Verneinung wird nachdrücklich wiederholt, damit sie recht ins Gewicht fällt. In Angelys fest der Handwerker erhält ein Geselle auf die Frage ‘Hat keener Schwamm?’ keine Antwort; als er dann aber sagt: ‘Hat den keener keenen Schwamm nich?’ findet er Gehör. [...] Auch die Fügewörter werden oft nachdrücklich verstärkt. Für das bloße indem heißt es indem daß, und desselben Zusatzes erfreuen sich ehe, seitdem, jemehr, damit u.a. Der Wesfall ist bis auf einzelne Reste ausgestorben. Daher hat Goethe wohl daran gethan, daß er die Worte Georgs im Götz: ‘ein braver Reiter und ein rechter Regen mangeln niemals eines Pfades’ 1773 geändert hat in ‘kommen überall durch’. Erst so ist der Ausdruck volkstümlich geworden. Statt des besitzanzeigenden Wesfalls tritt der durch das Fürwort sein oder ihr verstärkte Wemfall ein: dem Vater sein Garten = des Vaters Garten. Diesen Kunstgriff verwendet auch Schiller in Wallensteins Lager, um der Rede volkstümliche Färbung zu geben; denn er läßt den Wachtmeister sagen: ‘Auf der Fortuna ihrem Schiff’ (7,42) und ‘des Teufels sein Angesicht’ (11,79f.). Ähnlich verfahren Goethe, Bürger, Gellert u.a. Dichter“ (Weise 1902: 75f.).

possessor(-DP) with a possessive pronoun, as illustrated in (1) from Bavarian. I call this construction DP-internal prenominal possessor construction (DPIPPC).²

- (1) am Sepp sei Haus
the Joe-DAT his house

DPIPPCs seem to occur (or, at least, to have occurred) in all Germanic languages, as well as in many non-Germanic and non-European languages, as we can learn from the extensive survey given by Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2003).³ According to her, DPIPPC are cross-linguistically very frequent. In the following, I restrict myself to data mainly taken from German dialects (these are much less studied than in other Germanic languages, especially the Scandinavian) and I will concentrate on the question of variation and/or uniformity.

First, with respect to case marking of the DP-internal possessor, we can observe variation to a considerable extent. In (1), the DP-internal possessor is case-marked with dative. Besides dative, the possessor can be marked with genitive, as in (2a), with combinations of dative and genitive, as in (2b), with accusative, as in (2c), or it can appear without any morphological case-marking, as in (2d).

- (2)a s Lehrers sin Hund (Alemannic, G. Seiler, p.c)
the teacher-GEN his dog
 b s fader sim bläts (Alsatian, Schirmunski 1962: 435)
the-GEN father-DAT his plac
 c unen bfara saena hüne (Thuringian, Sperschneider 1959: 23)
our priest-ACC his hens
 d rik Lüd ehr Döchter und arm Lüd ehr Kalwer
rich people their daughters and poor people their calves
 (Low German, U. Johnson, Jahrestage 2, 508)

So we have a lot of variation with respect to case marking. Yet, it is important to note that this variation has nothing to do with DPIPPC as such, but reflects the morphological case systems of the respective varieties. In other words: in those few dialects which still possess a morphological genitive, this case is used to mark the DP-internal possessor; if there is no genitive, dative is used, and so on. So we get the hierarchy of cases given in (A):

- (A) GEN > DAT > ACC > ZERO⁴

However, we can observe a lot of divergence between the dialects with respect to. case marking, it is reasonable to assume that this variation is a surface phenomenon, not reflecting any deeper differences (e.g., structural ones). It is common to distinguish between morphological and abstract or deep case (cf. Sigurdsson 2004). Morphological case is an exponent of the phonetic form (PF) and as such language specific, whereas abstract case is or can be conceived of as a formal feature in the sense of the Minimalist Program (MP), and is thus universal, and not open to variation. The relation between abstract and morphological case is uniform across languages and language specific at the same time. It is uniform in the sense that morphological case is the PF-exponent of abstract case (Sigurdsson 2004) – and it is language specific in the sense that the spell-out form of abstract case depends on the morphological case system of the respective language. With

² There is no uniform terminology w.r.t. to these constructions, cf. the terms ‘possessive noun phrases with linking pronouns’ (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2003), ‘prenominal possessor doubling’ (Julien 2005) and others.

³ See also Sycia (1994) for additional data from creoles (French-based creoles: Mauritian Creole, Louisiana, Karipuna; English-based creoles: Papiamentu; Dutch-based creole: Negerhollands, Berbice (Sami fi jerma ‘Sammy his wife’)) and African languages: Twi (Ata ne na ‘Ata his mother’), Ewe (ale fe afo ‘sheep its foot’)

⁴ The mixed case forms are neglected here.

respect to DPIPCCs, we can assume an abstract case POSSESSOR that can be spelled out morphologically as genitive, dative, accusative or zero.

From this point of view, variation is restricted to PF, but does not occur in narrow syntax, that is, at the level of structures, as I will show below in more detail. Yet, this does not mean of course that morphological variation is irrelevant or uninteresting for linguistic research. An interesting point here is, for example, a kind of recycling of morphological material, as can be seen in those constructions which show a mixture of dative and genitive morphology. (2b) above combines a genitive article with a noun case-marked for dative (or probably zero-marked). As (3a) shows, the reverse combination, i.e. the combination of a dative article with a noun case-marked for genitive, is also found in Alemannic varieties, though in another type of DPIPCC. This second type, known as prenominal genitive, is very frequent in many colloquial forms of Standard German (cf. 3b), and differs from the first type of DPIPCC in that it lacks the possessive pronoun. In some varieties of Alemannic mixed constructions seem to be evolved, exhibiting features of both types: the prenominal genitive \rightarrow (which is a very special genitive morpheme, if at all) and the possessive pronoun. Since both types of DPIPCCs have the same underlying structure as I will argue in a minute, such combinations are not very surprising. What is interesting here is that the genitive morphology is presumably no longer genitive, but – in the case of (3a) – a possessive marker and a phrasal clitic which attaches onto the possessor-DP case-marked for dative. So the original genitive morpheme \rightarrow seem to have has been re-analyzed as possessive marker: it only occurs in possessive constructions, and in the case of (3a), it has developed from an inflectional to a clitic element – a development which should not be possible under the standard assumptions regarding grammaticalization.

- (3)a *dum tokxters wägeli* (Fribourg German, Schirmunski 1962: 435)
the-DAT doctor-GEN coach
 b *Vaters Auto*
father's car
 c (aus) *nochbers sim fenšter* (Basel German, Schirmunski 1962: 435)
(out of) neighbour-GEN his window

In (some variants of) Bavarian, there is a third type of DPIPCC which converges with the first one in the dative-marking of the possessor-DP, but differs from it in two respects: first, D° is occupied with an indefinite article. And second, the POSS-relation is marked with a possessive adjective (cf. 4). This construction is very interesting, mainly for two reasons: first, the use of a possessive adjective instead of a possessive pronoun is relevant for the question of case assignment, i.e. which element assigns dative to the possessor-DP under which structural conditions; the second interesting point is the apparent indefiniteness of (4) which puts it in contrast with the definiteness restriction holding for most phrasal possessive constructions (cf. Julien 2005).

- (4) *am Schloßbauern a seinige Tochta*
the S.- DAT a his daughter

To summarize so far: we have found three types of DPIPCC listed under (B) which show variation in some respect. A first difference concerns case-marking of the possessor-DP.

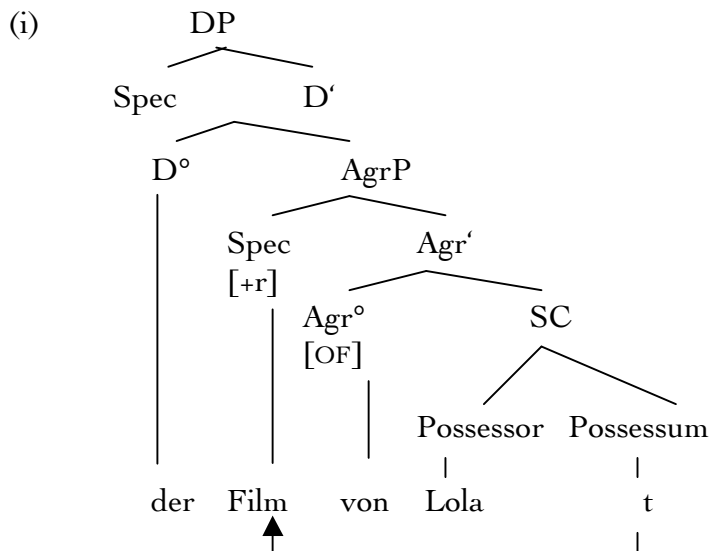
- (B) (i) $DP_{\text{POSSESSOR}} + \text{sein} + DP_{\text{POSSESSUM}}$
 (ii) $DP_{\text{POSSESSOR}} + \text{S} + DP_{\text{POSSESSUM}}$
 (iii) $DP_{\text{POSSESSOR}} + \text{Det} + \text{seinig} + DP_{\text{POSSESSUM}}$

We can conclude for sure that there is some microvariation on PF, that is, on the morphological level. However, with respect to underlying syntactic structures, there is, I think, no such variation. Neglecting the third kind of DPIPCC (which would need a

separate treatment), I assume that the possessive syntax of German dialects comprises the surface manifestations given under (5), that is in addition to what we have considered so far, a different construction with a postnominal possessor (cf. 5a).

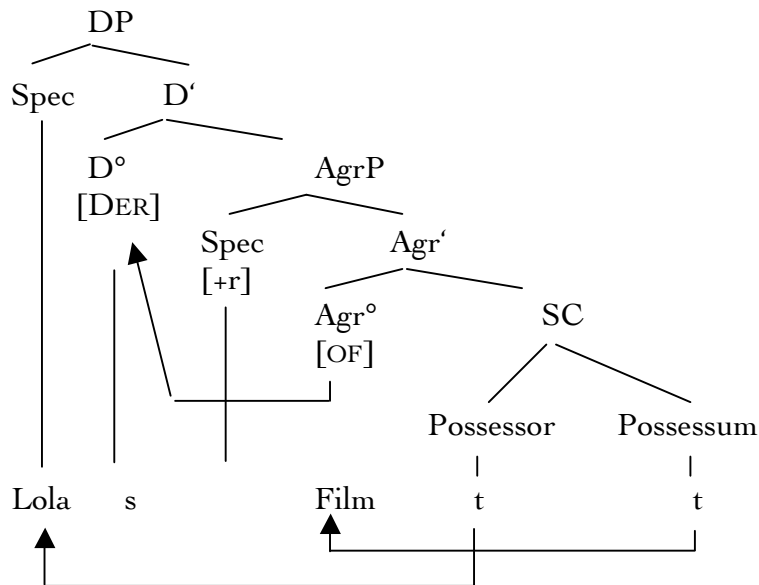
- (5) a der Film von Lola
 the film of Lola
 b Lolas Film
 Lola's film
 c der Lola ihr Film
 the Lola-DAT her film

The structures (i) to (iii) below show that these three constructions can be reduced to a single uniform syntactic structure. I adopt the structure developed by Uriagereka (2002) based on previous work by Szabolsci and Kayne.⁵ Possession is conceived of semantically as a relation establishing a thematic relationship between two linguistic expressions. This possessive relation is syntactically encoded by a small clause phrase structure in which the two linguistic expressions get the thematic roles POSSESSOR and POSSESSUM respectively. The SC is headed by an AgrP which is also responsible for reference: Whatever moves to (or through) its Spec position is assigned a referential feature. In the case of the DPIPCCs it is always the possessum-DP that raises and determines reference, but in principle it could be the possessor-DP as well (as it is the case, for instance, in the sentence *John has a sister*). Agr° can be lexicalized as a function word which is always a form of the preposition *von* 'of' in the case of German dialects.

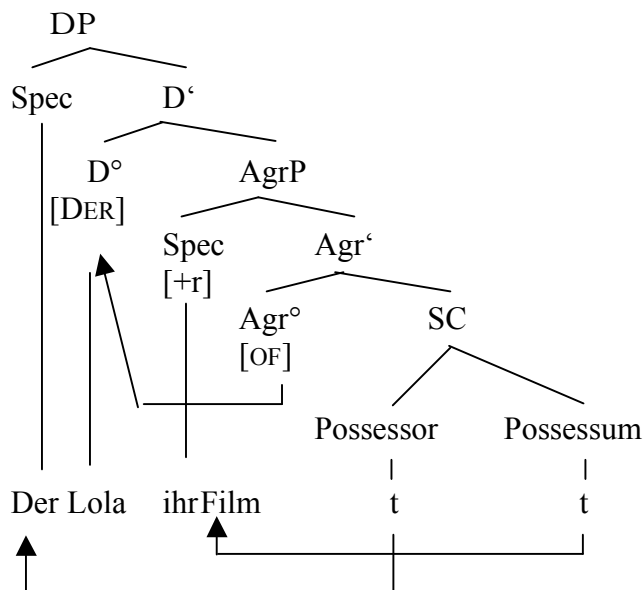


⁵ For other proposals see, among many others, Larson/Cho (2003), Alexiadou (2004), Julien (2005).

- (ii) prenominal genitive
[DER]+ [VON] = s



- (iii) possessive dative
[DER]+ [VON] = sein



But if there is no lexical materialization of the abstract preposition, Agr° raises and incorporates into the D head, resulting in the respective spell-out forms $\rightarrow s$ or $sein$, as can be seen in (ii) and (iii). In this case, the possessor-DP raises to Spec-DP, presumably in order to get case marked.

Due to the lack of space, I cannot go into all details, but it should have become clear that the SC structure analysis can account for all three types of DPIPcs in (5a-c) in a uniform way. If this is on the right track, then we may conclude that there is no variation with

respect to the underlying syntactic structure. The observable variation is restricted to PF or morphology, but does not reflect any deeper syntactic differences.

2 ■ THE FUNCTION OF DOUBLE MARKING

I will now turn to the question of the function of possessive double marking. As mentioned at the beginning of my talk, doubling phenomena like the one occurring in DPIPPCs have been understood as intentionally motivated. Doubling has been taken as reflecting the intention of speakers to increase clearness and/or emphasis; in other words: it has been assigned a communicative function. Seen in this way, doubling is or should be a superfluous and redundant operation, which is not grammatically or syntactically forced. Surprisingly, however, it seems that most doubling phenomena are obligatory – which can be taken as evidence for a grammatical or syntactic motivation.

When we look at the DPIPPCs, in (6a), for example, it seems as if the possessor is referred to twice: by the possessor-DP and by the possessive pronoun. The common assumption (cf. Zifonun 2003) is that this double reference taking is redundant, and furthermore, it even appears not to be necessary, as evidenced by the ungrammaticality of DPIPPCs in the first and second person (cf. 6b, c).⁶ It seems that (6a) shows the typical features attributed to dialect syntax: redundancy, idiosyncrasy, non-systematicity, and so on.

- (6)a eam sei Haus
 him his house
 b* mir mei Haus
 me my house
 c* dir dei Haus
 you your house

My explanation however, reveals a perfectly syntactic functionality of DPIPPCs: the double marking exists only on the superficial level, but there is no semantic redundancy (or more precisely, no redundancy with respect to referentiality), because the possessive pronoun does not refer to the possessor, but only marks the possessive relation.

A first evidence comes from the above mentioned mysterious restriction to the third person, shown by the data contrast in (6) above.⁷ As the data in (7) reveal, it is the person feature of the possessive pronoun which is relevant for grammaticality: (7a) shows that first and second person pronouns do appear as prenominal possessors, e.g. in Berlin German, as long as they combine with a third person possessive pronoun. The same holds for the honorific pronoun *Ihnen* which is a deictic item referring to the addressee, see (7b). It is also possible that a third person pronoun occurs as a prenominal possessor, but then it must be stressed as in (7c), that is only if it is used deictically.

- (7)a meiner/deiner seiner (Berlin German, Schiepek 1899/1908: 221)
 mine/yours his
 b Ihnen ihr Haus
 you their house
 c EAMsei Haus
 him his house

The data in (6) and (7) demonstrate two things: (i) the prenominal possessor must be a referring expression whose person feature is irrelevant; (ii) the possessive pronoun must be

⁶ Zifonun (2003: 107): „Der Zugriff auf den Possessor erfolgt also ohne semantische Not doppelt“.

⁷ Zifonun (2003: 101): „Die Frage, warum es kein Dat+Poss der ersten beiden Personen gibt, bleibt rätselhaft“.

in the third person. Therefore, the restriction to the third person only holds for the possessive pronoun, but not for the prenominal possessor.

As I have shown previously (Weiß 1998), this state of affairs can be explained in a very simple way, if we assume that third person pronouns differ in syntactic category from first and second person pronouns.⁸ Third person pronouns – be they personal or possessive pronouns – are anaphors which do not refer on their own force, but need to be bound by an antecedent to receive a referential interpretation. And it is the DP-internal possessor, an R-expression, which binds the anaphor. First and second person pronouns, in contrast, are referential, so first and second person possessive pronouns do not permit an additional DP-internal possessor. This explains the restriction of DPIPCCs to third person possessive pronouns in Germanic languages.⁹

Since the possessive pronouns are used like anaphors according to the binding theory, it should come as no surprise that there are varieties where a reflexive pronoun can be used alternatively to or even instead of a possessive pronoun. The first possibility can be observed in Western Jutish, a Danish dialect, the second in Norwegian (where this construction is known as *garp-genitive*, cf. Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2003: 669).

- (8)a æ mand sin/ hans hat (Western Jutish)
 the man REFL/POSS hat
 b Maria sit hus (Norwegian)
 Maria REFL house

The conclusion we can draw is thus that DPIPCCs do not really show double marking of the possessor, as is commonly assumed, because the DP-internal possessor and the possessive pronoun have different functions. The possessive pronoun marks the possessive relation, but does not refer to the possessor – it is the prenominal DP which refers to the possessor.

3 ■ SOME (PRELIMINARY) CONCLUSIONS

DPIPCCs exhibit a kind of double marking which is restricted to the surface, the level of morphology, whereas there is no doubling in syntax. The traditional analysis of DPIPCCs as possessor doubling is based on the assumption that possessive pronouns are all of the same syntactic category ‘pronoun’. However, that is not the case, as we have seen. Furthermore, the traditional analysis seems to involve a sort of category mismatch in that it appears to rest on a rather naive understanding of the relation between surface structure and meaning. Only a ‘translation’ of DPIPCCs into meaning lexeme by lexeme, without taking into account the structure the lexemes occur in, and their function within it, yields a ‘superfluous’ or ‘pleonastic’ element. In this respect the traditional view of DPIPCCs resembles the assumption that certain adjectives like the ones in (9a, b) should not be used with a superlative form. But they do occur in this way, as (9c) demonstrates, because gradation as a grammatical process is only concerned with syntactic category and not meaning.

⁸ That is not to say that they cannot be used in similar ways. As mentioned in the main text, third person pronouns can be used referentially, if stressed. Cf. Rullmann (2006) for data showing first and second person pronouns used as bound variables.

⁹ This restriction seems not to hold for all languages. There are languages like Hittite (cf. Lühr) with DPIPCCs where the prenominal possessor and a (enclitic) possessive adjective can appear in the first or second person. G. Kaiser (p.c.) has brought to my attention that French possesses a similar possessive construction without said restriction, cf. *ma/ta voiture à moi/toi*. In these cases it seems that first/second person pronouns are used anaphorically.

- (9)a kein-st
no-SUPERLATIV
 b einzig-st
single-SUPERLATIVE
 c in keinster Weise (Jogi Löw)
in no-SUPERLATIVE way

In a more serious respect, DPIPCCs resemble negative concord constructions like (10) where we, too, have two items morphologically marked for the same feature (in this case, the NEG-feature). Both constructions are ascribed the same property and the same purpose: they are redundant, because they contain semantically superfluous material which only serves to add emphasis to the utterance.

- (10) i han koa Geid ned (Bavarian)
 I have no money not

However, as syntactic research has revealed (among which my own, cf. Weiß 2002), the doubling of the NEG-feature has no ‘emphatic’ purpose, but is purely driven by requirements of narrow syntax, that is for checking reasons. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that the doubling NEG-feature is the feature on the negative indefinite and not the one introduced by the negative particle – contrary to what is traditionally assumed.

DPIPCCs and NC-constructions are thus two examples showing that syntactic research within a formalist framework could reveal that the function of apparent or real doubling constructions is completely different from what is assumed from a traditional functionalist perspective. Furthermore, the explanation given here for DPIPCCs can contribute to our understanding of the structural and functional architecture of human language, since it shows, if correct, that there is much less redundancy on these levels than commonly assumed. This is a first conclusion we can draw.

But there is another important thing we can learn from formalist syntactic research: there are different kinds of doubling. Unlike the phenomena discussed by Cecilia Poletto in her talk, DPIPCCs and NC constructions do not involve two elements sharing a single syntactic function with one of the elements being a head and the other an XP. So what appears to be instances of the same type at first glance, can be shown to be completely different, if investigated more deeply.

A last question I will very briefly discuss is: why are doubling phenomena absent in so many standard languages. The reason obviously is that standardization – the process of forming standard languages – is a sociolinguistic process (Weiß 1999, 2004). That means: extra-linguistic factors are involved in the development of standard languages to a much greater extent as they are in the development of dialects. And one factor, responsible for the ban of doubling phenomena from standard languages, is the assumption that these constructions are redundant and thus superfluous.

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