

ENGLISH AND GERMAN POSSESSIONAL ADJECTIVES: A LINGUISTIC EXPLANATION FOR AN ERROR OF OMISSION

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One argument for the inclusion of contrastive linguistics into the university syllabus for prospective language teachers is that it provides for a more economical way of teaching the target language. This argument has acquired a very special meaning for quite a number of students as well as teachers already engaged in practical work at schools. They think that they have to concentrate their teaching on areas in which there are interlanguage differences and may leave out those in which the mother-tongue of their pupils and the foreign language agree. In this way, they believe, they can economize on their time arguing that in the minds of the pupils a simple process of transfer of learning will take place, which will enable them to acquire the foreign structures without special training. Since this conviction is widespread and since indeed some general introductions to contrastive studies¹ may be made responsible for it, it is necessary not only to point out that this is an oversimplification of the process of learning a foreign language, but also to explain in a particular case that a construction cannot be viewed in isolation but must be viewed as part of an interlocking system.

The problem may be illustrated within English and German by the structures covered by the term *possessional adjective*². They are prenominal attri-

¹ In these introductions the term "contrastive" itself may mean either the differences alone or the differences and similarities between languages. Cf., e.g., the following statements: Wir nennen dies eine Kontrastive Analyse, weil es nur die Unterschiede, die Kontraste sind, die uns hier beschäftigen (Kufner 1971: 12). "This study is part of a series of contrastive structure studies which describe the similarities and differences between English and... five foreign languages..." (Ch. A. Ferguson in Kufner 1962: VI).

² The term is taken from Jespersen (1914: 375).

butes like the following:

<i>das buntgestreifte Band</i> (96)	—	<i>the gaily-striped ribbon</i> (109)
<i>das goldgeränderte Porzellan</i> (135)	—	<i>the gold bordered porcelain</i> (152)
<i>der edel geformte Mund</i> (199)	—	<i>the nobly formed mouth</i> (224)
<i>eine langgestielte Lorgnette</i> (90)	—	<i>a long-handled lorgnon</i> (102) ³

These constructions may be related in English and German to an underlying structure containing a PRO-verb that we can think of as HAVE or HABEN respectively (Quirk et al. 1972:100; Brinkmann 1959). E.g., *ein buntgestreiftes Band* may be derived from *ein Band, das bunte Streifen hat* and *a gaily-striped ribbon* from *a ribbon that has gay stripes*. Again in English and German they are part of a wider area defined by the existence of the same verbs HAVE and HABEN in the underlying structure. The structures they are related to are realized by the genitive in German and a case form marked by 's or a prepositional phrase containing *of* in English, e.g. *des Mannes Wagen* — *the man's car* or *the car of the man*. These phrases may be circumscribed as *der Mann hat einen Wagen* and *the man has a car*. The close relation of this construction type and the *possessional adjectives* may be illustrated by the following sequence:

the red-lipped girl
 the red lips of the girl
 the girl's red lips

Both German and English *possessional adjectives* are distinguished from the forms just mentioned by the fact that the noun in the embedded sentence of the underlying construction has to be an optional or obligatory part of the one it is to be made an attribute of (Hirtle 1969; Ströbel 1970). In our first example, *the gaily-striped ribbon*, *stripes* may be regarded as an optional characteristic of *ribbon*. In the construction *the red-lipped girl* the notion of *lip* is an integral part of the notion of *girl*. Generally speaking, this part — whole relationship, a necessary condition for the application of the rule that generates *possessional adjectives*, distinguishes these from the related construction *the man's car* and *der Wagen des Mannes*. *A car* is not part of *a man* and thus we may not say something like **the carred man* or **der bewagte Mann*.

Thus, there seems to be a sound enough basis for saying that English and German *possessional adjectives* are similar in both languages. Indeed, they would perhaps be derived from identical underlying structures in a comparative English and German grammar. The transformation applying

³ These examples and others given with page numbers, unless otherwise noted, are taken from Mann (1960) and its translation Mann (1957).

to them would very often result in a structural change that would clearly indicate this fact. A morphological rule which operates in a small number of cases in German and which would tend to obscure the common rule will be discussed below.

If it were true, then, that constructions based on common rules in source and target language take care of themselves in the process of language learning, a German Abitur candidate should be able to use them freely when the opportunity arises. This, however, does not seem to be the case. An investigation undertaken in Paderborn in April 1973 of fifty Abitur examination papers of students whose teachers had not given them any special exercises pertaining to the construction under discussion showed that about half the candidates could repeat correctly an example given in the text that they had to reproduce. E.g., one text read to a group of 13 students contained the construction *the ash-coloured children*. 5 of those 13 students repeated the phrase; the others used an adjective proper like *brown* or left the modification out altogether. None of the students could generate a *possessional adjective* by himself although the wording of the text provided the opportunity to do so. E.g., the students preferred the expression *a chauffeur in uniform* or even the awkward *a chauffeur in a uniform* to *a uniformed chauffeur*. At first sight this is all the more surprising since *possessional adjectives* are very much part of written English and furthermore this particular group of students came across the form as early as their third, out of ten years of English.

There are several reasons, however, that can be given from a linguistic point of view for the students' reluctance to use an English *possessional adjective*.

The first point is based on the fact that *possessional adjectives* in English and German grammar can be traced back to the optional embedding of a sentence in the underlying structure. This implies that for the generation of a grammatical sentence no attention has to be paid to the embedding at all and that the information in the embedded structure may be expressed in a separate sentence. In the sentence *He presented her with a gaily-striped ribbon* the modifier *gaily-striped* may be left out and the sentence is still grammatical: *He presented her with a ribbon*. Or we may connect it with a construction like *It had gay stripes* and by this means preserve the information content in the original sentence. Thus we are confronted with an entirely different situation from one in which an obligatory embedded sentence is required. In such case some special grammatical structure may have to be used and would therefore be practiced automatically by the student. With *possessional adjectives*, however, it is not only the case that they derive from an optional embedding but also that they are the results of a structural change of just one of a number of transformational rules which could have applied. In both English and German *the gaily-striped ribbon* or *das buntgestreifte*

Band can be paraphrased using either a relative clause or a prepositional phrase: *the ribbon that has gay stripes* and *das Band, das bunte Streifen hat*, or *the ribbon with gay stripes* — *das Band mit bunten Streifen*. Thus we see that in English and German the use of a *possessional adjective* is not only optional but actually competes with different construction types that derive from the identical underlying structure.

One may also point out here modification structures that are related to *possessional adjectives* but less clearly than those just mentioned. A few examples from a German original, Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* and its English translation by R. T. Lowe-Porter will serve as a short cut to establish an inter-language relationship. Judging from these texts, *possessional adjectives* most often share characteristics with adjectives and second participle attributes.

ein schwarzgefleckter Jagdhund (13) —
a black and white hunting dog (14)

ihre schwarzen, länglich geschnittenen Augen (290) —
her narrow black eyes (328)

a coffee-coloured coat (383) —
ein kaffeebrauner Leibrock (337)

a clear-sighted man (403) —
ein heller Kopf (355)

The next set of examples will uncover the relation between attributive second participles and *possessional adjectives*. Again the structures show that the relation works both ways.

ein grünbezogener Tisch (152) —
a table covered with green baize (170)

the lace-edged pillows (258) —
das von Spitzenborten umgebene Kissen (229)

the gilt-lined silver basin (307)
die silberne, innen vergoldete Schale (272)

From these examples we can deduce the following explanation of the observation made above concerning German students' reluctance to use English *possessional adjectives*. From the standpoint of English grammar there is no syntactic necessity to use the construction. The students are not obliged to use *possessional adjectives* to communicate their semantic content because there are a number of equivalent construction types they could use.

A second problem the students face concerns the formal means German

and English grammars provide for recognizing *possessional adjectives*. In English these attributes are generally identical with the form of second participles; that is to say, they are marked in most cases by the suffix spelled *-ed* as in *good-mannered*, *fearless hearted*, *sweet voiced*, etc. This identity of form is so developed in English that in those cases in which the attributed noun has the same phonemic structure as a so-called irregular verb, this noun takes on the same form as the verb used as a second participle. For example, the lexical items *spring* and *build* are nouns in the sentences *The mattress has good springs*, *The man has a powerful build*, and verbs in *He wants to spring over the ditch*, *He wants to build her a chest*. The verbs *to spring* and *to build* have an irregular second participle, i.e., *sprung* and *built* respectively and the *possessional adjectives* are *well sprung*, *powerfully built* and not **well-sprunged*, **powerfully builded*. In German the situation is more complicated. As with the second participles of verbs, we have one group of *possessional adjectives* that are introduced with the prefix *ge-* while another group is not. For example we find *die langgestielte Lorgnette* as opposed to *der begüterte Kaufmann*, *das goldgeränderte Porzellan* as opposed to *die blondbehaarte Hand*. Again, as is the case with second participles of verbs, *possessional adjectives* in German feature two different kinds of endings, one is spelled *-t*, the other *-en*, as in *seine gehöckerte Nase*, *das gesprungene Glas*. With some German *possessional adjectives*, however, an obligatory transformation applies which replaces the verbal suffix *-t* and *-en* by the adjectival suffix spelled *-ig* as in *ein hochlehniiger Stuhl*, *eine einseitige Erklärung*, *ein dorniger Strauch*, etc.

To round off this short characterization of the formal aspect of German and English *possessional adjectives* just one last point should be mentioned. It is illustrated by the following sentences and their corresponding *possessional adjectives*:

Seine Hände haben zartblaue Adern — *seine zartblau geäderten Hände*
Die Weste hat blaue Karos — *die blaukarierte Weste*.
Das Porzellan hat einen goldenen Rand — *das goldgeränderte Porzellan*.

The examples show that in some German *possessional adjectives* a conversion from noun to verb has taken place in the process of correctly generating the structures. This type of structural change does not occur in English although some change of form does occur in a highly restricted number of cases, e.g. in a *loose-lived book*. The form *leaved* is derived from the noun *leaf*. It does not represent a conversion to the verb *to leave* but rather reflects the fact that a certain number of nouns ending in a voiceless labiodental fricative have the feature *voiceless* of this consonant changed to *voiced* when it loses its final position. This process has also been operative in the generation of the possessional adjective *short-lived* as in *a short-lived price freeze*. In this

case, however, the same additional shortening of the vowel has taken place as in *rough shod*, a form which, if it had been regularly made, would be *rough shoed*.

The close resemblance of German and English *possessional adjectives* to the attributed second participle makes it very difficult for a student to identify them correctly. He has to learn to distinguish a *possessional adjective* from a second participle construction and, thus, he has actually not only to learn to recognize the first, but also to recognize the second. Before any successful transfer of learning can take place, a student has to be able to recognize clearly the structure he is supposed to acquire. For a German student, in this case, this task is the more difficult for a number of reasons. First we might mention that English lacks an equivalent rule to the German one that generates *possessional adjectives* in *-ig*. In German the presence of the suffix is a clear indication that the attribute under consideration is not a second participle. Thus the item *glockenförmig* in *der glockenförmige Rock* will be immediately recognized as a *possessional adjective* while the English translation equivalent *the bell-shaped coat* may mean both the coat that has the shape of a bell or the coat that has been shaped like a bell. A second difficulty lies in the fact that in English there are a considerable number of nouns and verbs which are identical in their phonemic structure. For example, the item *husk* is both a noun and a verb whereas the German equivalent would be *Hülse* and *enthülsen*. Through the presence of the prefix *ent-* the message of the following sentence is immediately clear:

Succotash ist ein indianisches Wort, das ursprünglich enthülster Mais bedeutete.

However, if you said to a German student of English (*International Herald Tribune*, September 13, 1972: 8) *Succotash is an Indian word which originally meant husked corn*, he may very likely consider *husked* a *possessional adjective*. Similarly, the existence of a noun *pinion* and a verb *to pinion* will make it very difficult to decide what is meant by the construction *the tall, pink pinioned birds strut around, goosestepping in cadence* (*ibid.*, January 9, 1973: 14). The German student may be unable to decide which of the following two interpretations is the correct one:

the tall birds, which have pink pinions
the tall, pink birds which have been pinioned.

The regular distinction in English between adverbs and adjectives by the ending *-ly* is the third reason German students are unwilling to use *possessional adjectives*. The fact that a formal differentiation of this kind does not exist illustrates the point that for an unaided transfer of learning to take place it is not sufficient that a certain type of construction is governed by

the same rule in two languages, but that attention has to be paid to how the identical rule reflects distinctions that are made in some other section of the grammar of the two languages. In this particular case we have to pay attention to the fact that there may be two English equivalents to one German construction as is the case with:

die merkwürdig geformte Schachtel which equals both:
the curious shaped box
the curiously shaped box.

This shows that a German student dealing with *possessional adjectives* in English has to take note of a distinction he has become acquainted with while learning the first characteristics of the English noun phrase and the English verb phrase.

The conditions that are valid in these contexts, however, do not apply exclusively within those constructions that contain *possessional adjectives* or second participle attributes. The student turning to the question what rules apply here is in very much the same position as a linguist embarking on a new field of study. It is obvious, however, that he is in a much more difficult position. It is not one rule he has to discover but several to which the infamous exceptions have to be added. To give an idea of what the student who is being left alone to learn *possessional adjectives* has to find out, here are some first results of a questionnaire presented to twenty native speakers of English. There is general agreement about the grammaticality and difference in meaning of the constructions like the following:

the different coloured car — *the differently coloured car*
the moderate sized college — *the moderately sized college*
the queer shaped case — *the queerly shaped case*
the strange windowed house — *the strangely windowed house.*

The special characteristic of the constructions is that the form in *-ed* is marked as both noun and verb in the lexicon and the difference in meaning agrees with this. Thus *a different coloured car* is a car that has a different colour, it may be black while all the others are white. *Differently coloured cars*, on the other hand, are cars which have been coloured differently, one may be white, the other black, a third may be red, and so on.

In the next group of examples both adjective and adverb are correct and the form suffixed by *-ed* may be taken as a noun or a verb. But in contrast to the first set of constructions, adverb and adjective seem to be freely exchangeable without any alteration of the meaning. Thus we find:

a sweet voiced girl — *a sweetly voiced girl*
a perfect shaped face — *a perfectly shaped face.*

Part of the explanation for this phenomenon is based on collocational restrictions that exist in the underlying structure; e.g., we can only say: *the girl who has a sweet voice* and not **the girl who has been voiced sweetly*. This observation is connected with the fact that you can say: *the complaint that has been sweetly voiced* and *the sweetly voiced complaint* but not **the complaint that has a sweet voice* and **a sweet voiced complaint*, or we might say the other way round that there has to be a difference in meaning between *a strong featured actress* and *a strongly featured actress* because *strong* collocates with the noun *feature* and *strongly* with the verb *to feature*.

While in the two sets of examples just mentioned both adjective and adverb were correct, there is quite a large group in which the choice between them is directly related to the grammaticality of the construction. This is, for example, the case with those *possessional adjectives* which derive from nouns such as *eye, heart, hand, head, brain, body, blood*. Thus it is only correct to say: *the fearless hearted soldier* and not **the fearlessly hearted soldier*, *the strong headed father* and not **the strongly headed father*, etc. It may be interesting to note that a number of those questioned not only accepted *the heavily armed soldier* but also *the heavy armed soldier*. The latter, however, meant to them that the soldier had heavy limbs.

Thus it is no wonder that the poor German student of English does not attempt the *possessional adjective* despite its close relation to the German. He much prefers to use one of the other related structures so that he does not have to identify it or to make decisions based on the interlocking of *possessional adjectives* with regularities that contrast in the two languages.

The opinion stated at the beginning of this paper that an unaided transfer of language learning may take place when the construction types do not contrast is not relevant to *possessional adjectives* for the following three reasons: First, syntactically, there is no necessity to employ the form; second, for a successful transfer of learning to take place the grammatical construction has to be clearly identifiable. This is not the case with German and English *possessional adjectives* because of their close formal relatedness to attributed second participles. Third, German and English *possessional adjectives* are part of the total language system and are tied up with regularities that contrast in the two languages thus introducing a learning difficulty.

In conclusion one may predict the unaided transfer of learning in a student only when the following questions may be answered positively:

Is there a syntactical necessity for the student to use the structure concerned?
Is it conditioned only upon structures that do not represent a learning problem?

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