Double agreement in possessor doubling – against DP-over-NP and in favor of NP-over-DP

Doreen Georgi (Leipzig) & Martin Salzmann (Zürich)

1. Summary. We argue in favor of an NP-over-DP approach to the possessor doubling construction (PDC) in Germanic (we illustrate our claims on the basis of colloquial German) cf. (1). We propose that possessor case invariably comes from N, thereby allowing a unification of superficially different doubling constructions in German with possessor agreement in languages like Turkish. We will show that this avoids serious intervention problems and we will provide a deeper motive for possessor fronting.

2. Basic facts. There are two major arguments in favor of locating the possessor in the specifier of D: First, it can bind a reflexive in the complement of N and thus c-commands the rest of the NP/DP, cf. (2). Second, in some varieties, the possessor can be marginally extracted (from predicative NPs), cf. (3).

3. Problems with agreement. The possessive pronoun is morphologically complex: While the stem varies according to the phi-features of the possessor, the ending agrees in phi-features and case with the possessum (this also holds for West Flemish and Dutch, but e.g. not for Norwegian). Interestingly, no one has addressed this issue from a syntactic point of view in much depth (but cf. the partial analysis in Heck & Müller 2007 and the analysis of Sternefeld 2006 in a somewhat different framework). It is not a priori clear how a single element (D) can agree with two different goals simultaneously. Additionally, given that D agrees with two goals, it is difficult to explain for a DP-approach why only the features of the possessum percolate to DP, but not those of the possessor (the agreeing verb is plural, in accordance with N, but not the possessor), cf. (4)

4. Problems with Intervention. It is generally assumed that possessor case comes from D (e.g. Delsing 1998, Haegeman 2004, de Vries 2006, Weiss 2008). This leads to a serious intervention problem: One the one hand, D has to probe for a DP to assign dative case to (the possessor), on the other hand, it has to agree with N. If the possessor is merged above N, it is unclear why D does not bear the features of the possessor as the possessor c-commands N and thus should intervene, cf. (5)a. If the possessor is merged as a complement of N, dative could be assigned to N so that the possessor would remain case-less, leading to a crash, cf. (5)b.

5. In favor of NP-over-DP. Georgi & Müller (2010) have shown that some of the core evidence in favor of the DP-hypothesis is inconclusive and can be explained straightforwardly by means of reprojection of N. The percolation facts in the PDC provide another argument in favor of the NP-over-DP approach: Since N is the head of the entire noun phrase while D is just a specifier, NP-over-DP predicts the features of N to be relevant for agreement with the verb, in accordance with (4). Agreement between an outside probe (v/T) and NP then only involves inherent features of N, but not probe features of D, which we consider very desirable.

5. Analysis.

a) Structure-building. In line with most of the literature, we assume that the possessor is introduced below D. If N has no arguments of its own, the possessor is merged as a complement of N, cf. (6); if N has arguments, the possessor is introduced above N, cf. (7). The possessive pronoun is merged last.

b) Agree N – Possessor: We assume that N has the probe features [∗dat∗] and [phi: __] in addition to inherent phi-features and an unspecified case-feature. The possessor has inherent phi-features and an unspecified case-feature. In (6), N Agrees with the possessor and values case on the possessor while the phi-features of the possessor are copied onto N (but remain unrealized, but cf. (12) below). Basically the same happens in (7), the only difference being that the probe features percolate to N' to allow case-valuation by N.

c) Agree D – N: D has probe features [case: __] and [phi: __] and agrees with N (leading to feature sharing). Since the possessor does not have any unvalued features anymore, it is inactive and does not intervene.

d) Triggering possessor fronting. The possessor still has to be fronted to the edge of NP. Given an Agree-approach, the fronting of the possessor needs motivation. While DP-approaches usually posit an equivalent of the traditional clausal EPP for the NP and use this as a trigger for possessor fronting (e.g. Delsing 1998), we cannot do so here because the possessor must not end up in the specifier of D, but rather in a specifier of N, cf. (8). We would like to argue that the fronting applies for reasons of binding: We take the possessive pronoun to be an anaphor that requires a local binder (cf. Weiss 2008). Technically, we implement this by means of an edge-feature on N that is put on top of the structure-building features. Since the possessor is the closest element (DP is already in an edge position), it is attracted to a higher spec. Since binding and not Agree is involved, morphological agreement between possessor and D is possible although the possessor is already deactivated. The results are shown in (9) (Roman letters = valuation; Greek letters = feature sharing).

e) Agree v/T – D/N: Finally, an outside probe values the case of D and (via feature sharing) of N.

6. Advantages. The assumption that N (and not the possessive pronoun) Agrees with and assigns case to the possessor helps accommodate certain constructions from Alemannic where (i) a dative possessor is possible without a possessive pronoun (10) or (ii) where a dative possessor appears together with a possessive '*s*, cf. (11). Case within NP in German is thus always assigned by N. Additionally, the analysis can be extended to unrelated languages where the Agree relationship between N and possessor is also marked on N, cf. e.g. the Turkish example in (12).

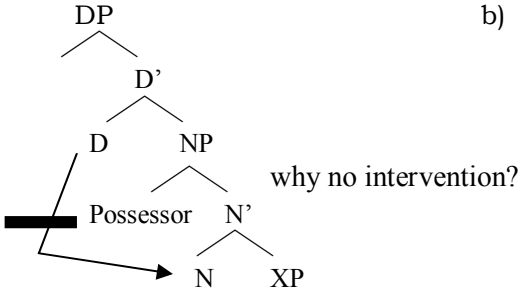
(1) [$_{DP}$ dem Hans [$_{D'}$ sein [$_{NP}$ Haus]]]
the.DAT John his house
'John's house'

(2) [$_{DP}$ dem Hans$_i$ [$_{D'}$ seine [$_{NP}$ Freude über sich$_i$]]]
the.DAT John his joy about self
'John$_i$'s joy about himself$_i$'

(3) Wem ist das sein Auto?
who.DAT is this his car
'Whose car is this?' (cf. also Delsing 1998 on Norwegian)

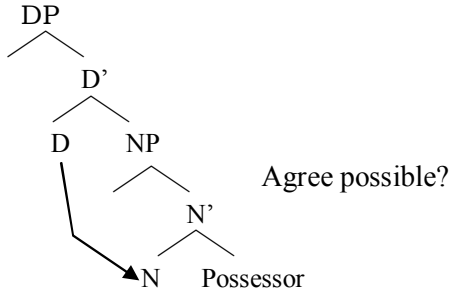
(4) [$_{DP}$ Dem Hans [$_{D'}$ seine [$_{NP}$ Häuser]]] sind schön.
the.DAT John his houses are nice
'John's houses are nice.'

(5) a)



why no intervention?

b)



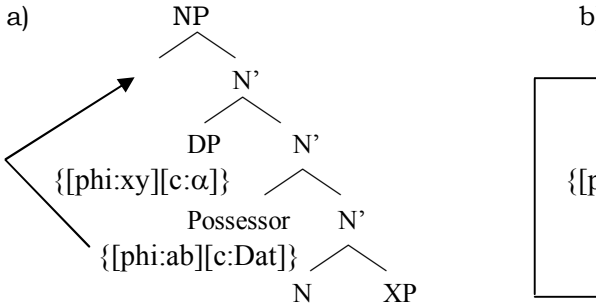
Agree possible?

(6) [n' DP [n' N Possessor]]

(7) [n' DP [n' Possessor [n' N XP]]

(8) [n' Possessor$_1$ [n' DP [n' __$_1$ [n' N XP]]]

(9) a)



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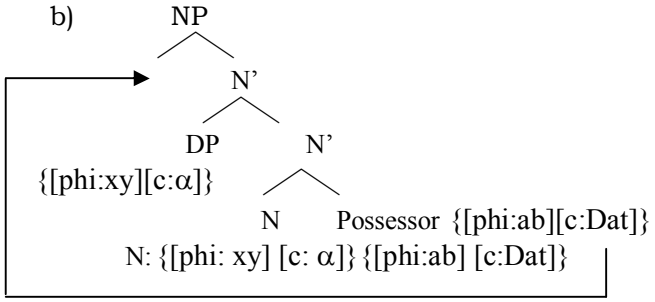

(10) em Peter **de** (lieb) Vatter (Lucerne German, Fischer 1960: 323, fn. 1)
the.DAT Peter the nice father
'Peter's nice father'

(11) dum tokxter =sch waegeli (Freiburg German, Henzen 1927: 179)
the.DAT doctor =poss coach
'the doctor's coach'

(12) (sen) [(biz-im) kitab-**ımız**]-ı oku-du-n mu?
you we-GEN book-1.PL.POS-ACC read-PST-2s Q
'Have you read our book?' (Kornfilt 1997: 185):

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