SEMANTIC-STRUCTURAL PECULIARITIES OF POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS[1]

(A comparative study of English and Lithuanian possessives)

L. VALEIKA

1. Syntactic Homonymy and Its Resolution

In view of the fact that the derivation of possessive constructions (as well as other nominals) involves the use of polyfunctional structural words as the g e n e t-i v e i n f l e x i o n and the p r e p o s i t i o n *of*, the resultant construction, taken out of the context, may be interpreted in more than one way. To put it in other words, the surface structure of possessive constructions may coincide with that of other constructions, e.g.

Petras turi knygą ↘
Petras parašė knygą ↗ Petro knyga

Peter has a book ↘
Peter wrote a book ↗ Peter's book

To resolve the homonymy, the languages being examined resort to differet devices. English, for instance, may avoid it by the use of the preposition *by*, e.g. *Peter wrote a book → the book by Peter*. There is a marked tendency in English to employ the preposition *of* for the expression of an objective relationship, e.g. *The picture represents Peter → the picture of Peter; the book describes Peter the Great → the book of Peter the Great*. Yet, this is only a tendency; in fact the function of the preposition *of* is not restricted to the expression of an objective relationship; *of* may render a possessive relationship as well, e.g. *Peter has the book → the book of Peter*. It will be noted, however, that the preposition *of* will unequivocally express an objective relationship when the head-noun is preceded by an indefinite determiner, e.g. *a book of Peter; a picture of Peter*.

Lithuanian disposes of no such means. To avoid the homonymy, Lithuanian has to overstep the boundaries of a simple construction. In other words, the actual relationship between A d j u n c t and H e a d will be shown by the expansion of H e a d, e.g. *Petras turi knygą → Petro knyga → Petro turima knyga; Petras parašė knygą → Petro parašyta knyga.*

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2. Syntactic Polysemy and Its Resolution

There is another kind of ambiguity, characteristic of both Lithuanian and English nominal constructions with Adjunct expressed by a noun. It results from functional peculiarities of the noun. As is generally known, any noun may refer to an individual or to the class as a whole[2]. To put it in other terms, the noun may be determined and undetermined. The functional peculiarities must necessarily reflect in the system of kernel sentences in a language. Thus, we have polysemous kernels, i.e. kernels whose subjective determiners[3] have a double value, e.g.

Vaikai turi kambarį (individual children)
(Some) children have a room ("   ")
Vaikai turi kambarį (children as a class)
Children have a room ("   "   )

Kernels whose subjective determiners are polysemous derive nominals with ambiguous adjuncts, e.g.

Vaikų kambarys (determined) — *vaikų kambarys* (undetermined)
The room of the children (determined) — *a children's room*

We will call the phenomenon syntactic polysemy[4] opposing it to syntactic homonymy. One might be inclined to treat the above constructions as homonymous. The view might be accepted, if we regard kernels with undetermined subjective determiners as homonyms. In our opinion, the two types of kernels are related; in fact, the second derives from the first. Such being the case, the kernels as well as the corresponding transforms should be treated as polysemous.

For convenience's sake we will divide the nominal constructions under examination into determined-adjunct constructions and undetermined-adjunct constructions. In this paper only problems related to determined constructions will be discussed and undetermined nominals will be examined in so far as they are concerned with determined ones.

Since nominal constructions are ambiguous, the question arises how the languages resolve the ambiguity, i.e. what linguistic devices they use to render the constructions unambiguous. It goes without saying that one of the devices is the context. Apart from the context, Lithuanian and English may resolve the ambiguity by other

[2] See L. Valeika, Some Functional Aspects of Noun Modifiers in Lithuanian and English, — Kalbotyra, XXIII(3), 1972, p. 81 − 92.

[3] Generally it is the subjective determiner which is characterized by the duality of function; objective determiners are usually determined.

[4] See also Л. Валейка, Некоторые аспекты синтаксической полисемии в литовском и английском языках, — Синтагматика, парадигматика и их взаимоотношение на уровне синтаксиса, Рига, 1970, p. 185 − 189.

means, viz., through synonymous structures, which are obtained by replacing undetermined-adjunct constructions by other nominals. Thus, undetermined genitives in Lithuanian and English may be substituded for by the corresponding adjectives. It should be observed, however, that, owing to the fact that the use of the genitive in English is restricted, the scope of the synonymous constructions is different in the two languages.

Theoretically, most undetermined genitives in Lithuanian may be transformed into the corresponding adjectives with the suffixes *-inis, -inė, -iškas, -iška*, e.g. *anties plunksna → antinė plunksna; vaiko batai → vaikiški batai.*

Practically, however, the transformation is not very common; more often than not Lithuanian speakers give preference to undetermined genitives. The reluctance to give up the genitive for the corresponding adjective can be accounted for linguistically by the fact that the change of the adjunct-noun into the corresponding adjective leads to a change in the inner semantic relationship between the LCs of the constructions[5]; if the genitive noun is in a position to express a complex of visions, the very substance of the thing, the corresponding adjective renders the noun conrete, i.e. it performs a labelling function. As a result, stylistically the genitive noun enhances the construction, while the adjective impoverishes it[6].

In recent years, however, the scope of the synonymous constructions in Lithuanian has somewhat expanded; new relative adjectives have come into being[7], e.g. *gamykla → gamyklinis; profsąjunga → profsąjunginis; universitetas → universitetinis*, etc.

The increase in the stock of relative adjectives results, above all, from the necessity to express the notion in as precise terms as possible. This is especially true of newly-coined terms, e.g. *atomo energija → atominė energija; universiteto jaunimas → universitetinis jaunimas.*

Another source of relative adjectives is the contact of Lithuanian with the Russian language where undetermined genitives have been largely replaced by the corresponding adjectives. Yet, at present there still exist a large number of undetermined

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[5] Cf. Э. Г. Мегребова, Взаимозаменяемость атрибутивных словосочетаний в современном английском языке, — Материалы третьей Дальневосточной конференции, посвященной 50-летию Советской власти, Владивосток, 1968, p. 165.

[6] P. Skardžius, Priesaga *-inis* ir jos vartojimas, — Gimtoji kalba, V, Kaunas, 1935; V. Drazdauskas, Tikrai taisytini dalykai, — Kultūros barai, 1969, 9, p. 65—66; P. Kniūkšta, Būdvardžiai su priesaga *-inis* ir jų gramatiniai sinonimai dabartinėje lietuvių kalboje (candidate's thesis, manuscript, V., 1971).

[7] B. Kalinauskas, Kai kurie nauji sintaksės reiškiniai šiandieninėje lietuvių kalboje, — Kalbos kultūros teorija ir praktika, Vilnius, 1970, p. 39—45.

genitive constructions which are not generally transposed into the corresponding constructions with adjectives, even when they are used to denote a class as a whole[8].

Apart from the morphological devices, the ambivalence may be resolved by syntactic devices, i. e. by the use of determiners in preposition to the genitive noun. However, not all determiners are in a position to reveal the actual function of the adjunct. To qualify as a marker, the determiner must unequivocally show its dependence on adjunct, e.g. *vaikų kambarys → šių vaikų | kambarys; gerų vaikų | kambarys; kažkokių vaikų | kambarys; dviejų vaikų | kambarys;* but: *Petraičio vaikų | kambarys; mano vaikų | kambarys.*

As regards English, polysemous nominals are less common. This can be accounted for by the following reasons:

1) the restriction of the use of the genitive: mostly animate nouns can take the genitive inflexion;

2) the limited occurrence of constructions with undetermined genitives (since they conflict with the central patterning, they are generally replaced by the common case nouns)[9];

3) adjuncts used postposedly (i.e. adjuncts expressed through the preposition *of*) are generally conceived as determined[10].

As can be seen, the sphere of polysemy in Lithuanian and English is restricted to the same type of construction, viz. a genitive-adjunct construction. The resolution of the polysemy also proceeds on the same lines — both morphological and syntactic devices may be applied. Like in Lithuanian, undetermined genitives in English may be replaced by the corresponding adjectives, e. g. *a woman's heart → a womanly heart; women's clothes → womanish clothes.* As compared to Lithuanian, this device is much more limited. The reason for this is the low productiveness of the adjective-deriving suffixes; low productiveness generally implies specificity of function: the addition of such a suffix generally involves a change in the semantic relations between the ICs[11]. Consequently, the transformation is not so frequent in Modern English[12].

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[8] N. Sližienė, Poilsinės ir poilsio įstaigos, — Statyba ir architektūra, Vilnius, 1969, 6, p. 32. So far the problem has received but scant attention. The evidence we have at our disposal leads us to believe that this concerns, above all, nouns derived from other parts of speech, agents in particular (e. g. *vairuotojas, tekintojas, ilgaliežuvis,* etc.). Next in order come proper names. However, not all proper names are equal in this respect. The most conservative are family names while place names may be transformed into the corresponding adjectives without considerable exceptions (e. g. *Anglijos prekės→angliškos prekės; Lietuvos baldai→lietuviški baldai*).

[9] Ralph Long, The Sentence and its Parts, The University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 244.

[10] Brian Kelly, An Advanced English Course for Foreign Students, Longmans, 1962, p. 413; R. W. Zandvort, A Handbook of English Grammar, Longmans, p. 1960.

[11] See Э. Г. Мэребова, op. cit., p. 165.

[12] For a full treatment of denominal adjectives in English, see Magnus Ljung, A Generative Study of the Semantics of a Group of High-Frequency Denominal Adjectives in English, Gothenburg, 1970.

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In view of this, English will more frequently resort to syntactic devices, i.e. the function of the adjunct-noun will be indicated by the use of determiners. Yet, determiners alone cannot serve as markers of adjunct's function; similarly to Lithuanian, in English they also need the support of morphological elements, viz. number opposemes, e.g.

a | bachelor's degree — a bachelor's | degree
a | woman's dress → a woman's | dress
a | hornet's nest — a hornet's | nest
a | man's umbrella — a man's | umbrella
| bachelors' degrees — bachelors' | degrees
| women's dresses — women's | dresses
| hornets' nests — hornets' | nests
| men's umbrellas — men's | umbrellas

As can be seen, the genitives in the above constructions are dually interpretable, regardless of the fact they are preceded by the indefinite determiner *a* in the first column and the zero determiner in the second column. The point is that, owing to the morphological expression of the adjunct-noun, the determiners in question cannot clearly show their syntactic dependence. Only constructions whose constituents belong to different number categories can be regarded as devoid of the ambiguity, e.g.

a | children's room   *a man's | shoes*
a | men's umbrella   *a woman's | dresses*
a | hornets' nest   *a child's | toys*
a | women's coat   *a boy's | skates*

As already mentioned, the polysemy of a construction may also be resolved by the transposition of the constituents, e.g.

a man's umbrella → the umbrella of a man
a woman's dress → the dress of a woman
a hornet's nest → the nest of a hornet
a boy's toy → the toy of a boy

Genitive nouns, when used in preposition to the head-noun, tend to be conceived as true attributes, while the position after the head-noun gives more prominence to the adjunct noun itself. As a result, postposed nouns are usually treated as individuals, i.e. determined.

The surest way to avoid the polysemy of the constructions lies in the transposition of undetermined genitives into common-case nouns, e.g. *a | peasant's hand → a peasant hand; a | baby's face → a baby face.*

It must be emphasized, however, that not all genitive-noun constructions can be transformed so. This applies, above all, to constructions whose adjuncts are expressed by nouns denoting sex, e.g. *a man — a woman*; *a lady — a gentleman*; *a boy — a girl*. This can be accounted for by the fact that the new pattern coincides in form with constructions with apposed nouns describing the head-noun from the point of view of sex, e.g. *a girl's friend — a girl friend*; *a boy's friend — a boy friend*. This may also account for the unacceptability of the following constructions: *a man's house — *a man house*; *a lady's umbrella — *a lady umbrella*.

Possessive constructions may exibit another kind of polysemy, viz. the polysemy of the head-noun. We have already noted in the preceding section that possessive kernels may contain both partitive and non-partitive TURĖTI: HAVE complements. When nominalised, however, the semantic difference between such complements is neutralised. Consider the following:

A. *Berniukas turi saldainių → berniuko saldainiai*
   The boy has some sweets → the boy's sweets
B. *Berniukas turi saldainius → berniuko saldainiai*
   The boy has the sweets → the boy's sweets
C. *Marytė turi knygų → Marytės knygos*
   Mary has some books → Mary's books
D. *Marytė turi knygas → Marytės knygos*
   Mary has the books → Mary's books

It would be logical to expect that partitive kernels should derive partitive constructions, while non-partitive kernels — non-partitive constructions. But neither Lithuanian nor English dispose of a grammatical device to mark the difference. The reason for this must be the fact that from the point of view of communication such a device is not necessary: possessive constructions are derivatives of possessive sentences, which, as already noted, are marked in this regard. To put it otherwise, possessive constructions are preceded by unambiguous antecedent structures. As language is not only economical but redundant as well, the polysemy of the head-noun may sometimes be resolved syntactically, i. e. by adding a quantifier, e.g.

A. *Berniukas turi pinigų → truputis, šiek tiek berniuko pinigų*
   The boy has some money → some of the boy's money
B. *Marytė turi knygų → keletas Marytės knygų*
   Mary has some books → some of Mary's books

Polysemous possessives may derive from non-partitive kernels as well:

A. *Berniukas turi saldainius → berniuko saldainiai*
   The boy has the sweets → the boy's sweets
B. *Marytė turi knygas → Marytės knygos*
   Mary has the books → Mary's books

This is to be expected, since the kernels are ambiguous as well. *Marytė turi knygas   Mary has the books* may be interpreted in two ways — *Marytė turi tas knygas (iš tų knygų)   Mary has the books (of those books)*. No devices (except the context) are available to resolve the kind of polysemy. It must be emphasized that the above constructions do not necessarily express a partitive meaning in the strict sense of the word[13]. This is especially true of constructions whose head-nouns are preceded by demonstrative pronouns as in *tas mano draugas: that friend of mine*. The constructions well compare to *ta ilga jo nosis: that long nose of his*. Even *mano senas dėdė : my old uncle / an old uncle of mine* can also be used to denote only one person. As can be seen, the demonstrative pronoun *tas-that* is endowed with two functions, viz. it may function both as a demonstrative proper and as an adjective. The adjectivization of pronouns in the two languages is little studied. Beyond doubt, such research would be very promising and the results would contribute to a fuller description of nominal constructions in the two languages.

Vilniaus V. Kapsuko universitetas
 Anglų filologijos katedra

POSESYVINIŲ JUNGINIŲ SEMANTINIAI-STRUKTŪRINIAI YPATUMAI
(lietuvių ir anglų kalbų posesyvinių junginių gretinamoji analizė)

Reziumė

Straipsnyje nagrinėjami posesyvinių junginių semantiniai bei struktūriniai ypatumai. Nustatyta, kad posesyviniai junginiai lietuvių ir anglų kalbose yra homonimiški ir polisemiški. Be konteksto, lietuvių ir anglų kalbos determinuoja posesyvinį junginį morfologinėmis bei sintaksinėmis priemonėmis. Būdama flektyvine kalba, lietuvių kalba dažniau naudojasi morfologinėmis priemonėmis; anglų kalboje, kur fleksijų palyginti labai nedaug, tokie junginiai determinuojami dažniausiai sintaksinėmis priemonėmis.

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[13] Otto Jespersen, A Modern English Grammar, Part III, Heidelberg, 1927, p. 12—22; also Jiri Nosek, Some Remarks on the Development of English Possessive Pronouns, — Časopis pro moderni filologii, 1955, VII/I—37, p. 190; for stylistic analysis of the constructions (*an old uncle of mine*), see A. S. Hornby, A Guide to Patterns and Usage in English, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 160—161.