

ADJECTIVES OR PRONOUN: THE STATUS OF PRENOMINAL POSSESSIVES

Nancy Mae Antrim

University of Texas at El Paso

Abstract: Within the generative framework prenominal possessives have been analyzed as adjectives, despite their failure to satisfy the general properties of adjectives. Further with respect to binding properties and weak crossover effects, the prenominal possessives behave more like pronouns. In Romance languages, these forms are adjectival only in that they show adjectival-like agreement. To capture both the agreement facts as well as their pronominal reference, possessives should be viewed as two-place predicates: possessor and possessed. The adjectival-like agreement reflects this predication relation; while, the pronominal reference of the possessor accounts for the pronominal-like behavior.

Keywords: possessives, predicates, Romance languages, pronouns, adjectives

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally possessives have been classified as either possessive adjectives or possessive pronouns (Lausberg, 1965; Grevisse, 1969; Tekavcic, 1972; among others). Assuming this traditional grammar classification of possessives, recent articles within the framework of generative grammar (Abney 1987, Tellier 1988, Valois 1991, Giorgi and Longobardi 1991, Tremblay 1991, Picallo 1994, among others) have treated possessive forms as either pronouns or adjectives, while focusing on the syntax of possessive constructions. However, in so doing previous accounts have been unable to fully account for the distribution or behavior of these possessive elements crosslinguistically. I propose that in order to fully account for possessive forms their status as either adjectives or pronouns (or possibly both) must be taken into account.

1.1 Prenominal Possessives in Romance

Prenominal possessives in the languages under discussion (e.g. French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese) occur in one of two ways. In Spanish and French, the prenominal possessive is a reduced form preceding and appearing with a noun: Possessive + Noun. In Italian and

Portuguese, the prenominal possessive is preceded by a determiner, which is required in the case of common nouns: Article + Possessive + Noun.

There are other notable differences between these two instantiations of the possessive. First the degree to which agreement is reflected in the possessive. The Italian possessive shows full agreement as to gender and number with the item possessed for all persons. The French prenominal possessive shows agreement with respect to number in all forms, but as to gender only in the singular. Gender agreement is lacking in the plural of first - third person singular, as well as, in first - third person plural. The Spanish prenominal possessive has number agreement for all forms, but shows no gender agreement for first - third person singular or third person plural.

A further point of contrast between the prenominal possessive in these languages involves definiteness effects. The French and Spanish prenominal possessives behave as + definite with respect to existential environments; whereas, the Italian and Portuguese possessives do not behave as + definite, as shown in (1).

- (1).a. *Hay mis hermanas en el parque. (Sp)
There are my sisters in the park.
- b. *Il y a mes soeurs qui arrivent. (Fr)
There are my sisters that arrive.
- c. *There is my sister in the garden.
- d. Ci sono sorelle mie che arrivano domani. (It)
There are sisters my that arrive tomorrow
There are sisters of mine that are arriving tomorrow.
- e. Tem amigos meus que gostam de fumar. (Po)
have friends my that like to smoke
There are friends of mine that like to smoke.

The possessive can also occur postnominally in Spanish, Italian and Portuguese, although not in modern French. These possessives appear in an unreduced or full form in Spanish and show agreement in both number and gender. The full form in Spanish, functioning as a pronoun, requires the addition of the article in certain environments. Morphologically, in French, the form of the possessive pronoun is the same as the stressed adjective form, now considered archaic, with the addition of the article. Unlike Spanish and French, the forms of both the possessive pronoun and the possessive adjective are the same in Italian and Portuguese.

2. THE ADJECTIVAL STATUS OF POSSESSIVES

To be considered as an adjective, in the traditional sense of the word, four properties are considered. First, an adjective can occur within a noun phrase functioning as an attribute, as in "a tall tree". Secondly, adjectives can occur as predicates, as in "the tree is tall". Moreover, adjectives can be modified by an intensifier, as in "the very tall tree". Note, however, that the number of intensifiers able to modify a possessive adjective are limited. Finally, adjectives can occur in comparative and superlative forms, as in "a taller tree, the tallest tree". Not all adjectives have all four properties which makes the classification of adjectival-like forms problematic.

The possessive forms in both Romance and Germanic languages exhibit these properties to varying degrees suggesting that either they are not true adjectives or that the category is gradient and fuzzy, which is contra the assumption that generative grammar has operated on.

Moreover, adjectives appear to vary in their interpretation with respect to their position. Prenominal adjectives are generally considered attributive, while postnominal ones are predicative. In Romance languages certain adjectives can occur both pre- and postnominally with a difference in meaning. The prenominal position giving a nonrestrictive reading as opposed to a restrictive reading for the postnominal position, as shown for Spanish in (2).

- (2).a. las olorosas flores (nonrestrictive)
 b. las flores olorosas (restrictive)
 the fragrant flowers (Bernstein 1993)

In prenominal position *olorosas*, *fragrant*, entails an inherent property of flowers; however, in postnominal position *olorosas* is limited to a particular set of flowers. This can be clearly seen within the context of a sentence, as in (3).

- (3). Las flores olorosas valen más.
 The flowers fragrant cost more.
 The fragrant flowers cost more.

Here the meaning is the same as a restrictive relative clause, which would restrict the flowers under consideration to only those which are fragrant. This implies that there are flowers which are not fragrant. The prenominal position refers to a property of flowers not to the existence of fragrant and non-fragrant varieties.

Interpretations according to position for adjectives do not appear to apply for possessives. Apparently, there is no difference in reading between pre- and postnominally positioned possessives. The postnominal position of the possessive can be used for emphasis, but this does not entail a difference in the reading, rather it entails an intensification of the reading. In Spanish, however, there does appear to be a difference in meaning, as given in (4).

- (4).a. Llamaron a mis hermanas.
 They called to my-pl sisters.
 b. Llamaron a hermanas mías.
 they called to sisters my-fm-pl.
 c. des soeurs á moi
 some sisters to me
 some of my sisters

In (4a), for some speakers, the intended reading is *they called all my sisters*; whereas in (4b) the reading is *they called some people who happened to be my sisters*. A reading, that in French, would be accounted for by using the dative construction shown in (4c). For other speakers, the postnominal position has an indefinite rather than a logical quantification reading. (4b) may also have a partitive interpretation as in the French example (4c).

While noting a difference between possessives and adjectives in respect to placement in Italian, Longobardi (USC class lecture notes: 15 Sept. 1994) claims postnominal possessives have only a contrastive specification. However, there is an apparent partitive reading with respect to the postnominal position and it may be this reading which supplies the contrastive focus. A

contrastive reading singles out a given subset of a group as opposed to another subset. A partitive reading also selects a subset of a larger set. Consider the Italian sentences in (5).

- (5). a. Hanno chiamato le mie sorelle.
they called (the-all?) my sisters
b. Hanno chiamato delle sorelle mie per partecipare alla sfilata
they called of the sisters my to participate in the parade
They called some of my sisters to participate...

Saltarelli (p.c.) notes the possibility of (5a) being interpreted as all the sisters; whereas, (5b) has a partitive interpretation.

2.1 Attributive Adjectives

While position may not provide any insight into the adjectival nature of possessives, it may be possible to maintain an adjectival account for possessives by employing the characteristics of a particular class of adjectives: attributive or predicative. Bernstein (1993) discusses four characteristics of "regular attributive" adjectives.

Predicates: First, they may always appear predicatively. This is the case with possessives in Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish (for the full form), as well as the independent English possessive, as seen in (6), respectively.

- (6).a. Questo denaro è mio. (It)
This money is mine
b. O livro é meu. (Po)
The book is mine
c. Es el mio (*mi). (Sp)
(It) is the mine
d. This book is mine.

While the possessive may occur as a predicate, in French after *être*, "be", it functions to emphasize a distinction, as in (7).

- (7). Ce livre-ci est le mien et celui-là est le tien.
This book is mine and that one is yours.

In non-contrastive predicative environments, the possessive is represented by *être* + *à* + a disjunctive pronoun, as in (8).

- (8). a. Ce livre est à lui.
This book is to him.
b. *Ce livre est le sien.
This book is the his.

Elliptical constructions: Secondly, "regular" attributive adjectives can appear in elliptical nominal constructions. Possessives in the Romance languages under discussion do not occur in these constructions, as shown in (9).

- (9). a. *Ella es mi propria. (Sp)

- She is my own
- b. *Elle est ma propre. (Fr)
 - c. *Ella é mia propria. (It)
 - d. *Ela é minha propria. (Po)

Both forms of the English possessive can occur in elliptical constructions, as shown in (10).

- (10).a. If you need a car, you can use my own.
- b. If you need a car, you can use mine.

There seems to be a varying degree of acceptability for (10) among English speakers. However, (11) is acceptable.

- (11). If you need a car, you can use your own.

Here "own" may be anaphoric rather than an intensifier.

Ne/en stranding: Thirdly, these adjectives are stranded by ne/en. This is the case in Italian, as shown in (12).

- (12). Ne ho visto uno mio.
- of them I have seen a my

However, it is not the case in French, as seen in (13).

- (13).a. *J'en ai trouvé une mienne.
- I of them found a mine
- Of them, I found one of mine.
- b. *J'en ai trouvé ma.
- I of them have found my
- c. J'en ai trouvé un
- I of them found one
- I found one of them

Modification: Finally, these adjectives can be modified by an intensifier. This appears to be the case in the Romance languages, under discussion, where the possessive appears prenominal, as shown in (14).

- (14).a. mi propria hermana Sp)
- my own sister
- b. la mia propria sorella (It)
- c. a minha própria irma (Po)
- d. ma propre soeur (Fr)

This is not the case for postnominal possessives in Spanish, and Italian if the intensifier is adjacent to the possessive, as seen in (15). Recall that French does not permit postnominal possessives.

- (15).a. *la hermana propria mia (Sp)
- b. *la sorella propria mia (It)

However, both Spanish, to some extent, and Italian allow for prenominal modification with a postnominal possessive, as shown in (16).

- (16). a. la stessa sorella mia (It.)
 the same sister my
 my own sister
 b. ? la misma hermana mia (Sp.)
 the same sister my

Portuguese, on the other hand, does allow postnominal modification with a postnominal possessive, as in (17a), but not further modification, as in (17b).

- (17). a. a própria irmã minha
 b. *a minha muito própria irmã

English possessives appear to be intensified by modification. The possessive can be modified by *own*, which provides two possible meanings, as shown in (18).

- (18). a. This is my own copy of LGB.
 b. Maki prepares her (own) recipes.

In (18a) *own* implies *mine and not anyone else's*. In (18b) the addition of *own* emphasizes coreference with the subject. This raises the question of whether *own* is an intensifier or, in fact, an anaphor. Omitting *own* makes coreference possible but not necessary. *Own* cannot modify the independent possessive; however, the possessive plus *own* can occur independently, as seen in (19).

- (19). a. *mine own
 b. I brought my own.

Note, also, that *own* follows the possessive while adjectival modifiers such as *very* precede the adjective. If, following Giorgi (1983), *propria*, *own*, is an anaphor then possessives may not be modified.

Summary: Status as Attributive Adjectives: To summarize, possessives in Romance are not consistent with the characteristics of "regular" attribute adjectives. This is summarized in the following chart.

Table 1 Regular Attributive Adjectives

	Predicate	Elliptical	ne/en	intensifier	
				pre	post
Fr	no	no	no	?	no
Sp	yes	no	N/A	?	no
It	yes	no	yes	?	no
Po	yes	no	N/A	?	yes
En					
pre-	no	yes	N/A	?	
ind	yes	yes	N/A		no

Note that the possessive traditionally classified as a pronoun in English behaves like an attributive adjective in respect to predicate and elliptical constructions.

2.2 Predicative Adjectives

If possessives are not consistently attributive, do they function predicatively, as in Italian and Portuguese, shown here in (20)?

- (20).a. Questo denaro è mio. (It)
 This money is mine.
 b. O livro é meu. (Po)
 The book is mine

Individual vs. stage level: If they function predicatively, the question arises as to whether they are stage level or individual level predicates. Diesing (1992) in her discussion of indefinites suggests several properties that aid in delineating these two types. Traditionally, stage level predicates have been considered temporary states; whereas, individual level predicates have been considered permanent states. Possession would appear to vary in this respect depending on the item possessed. Inalienable possession would by definition be a permanent state. Although possible extensions of inalienable possession, such as suggested by Vergnaud and Zubizarreta (1992) could have a temporary status. This distinction proves problematic, in the same way that the temporary-permanent distinction proved problematic for Diesing. She provides additional properties involving both semantic and syntactic distinctions. Following Diesing, stage level predicates permit there-insertion, while individual level predicates do not. This is related to the distinction between having an event argument with stage level and the lack of an event argument with individual level.

The lack of an event argument provides for a generic reading but not an existential reading. Individual level predicates allow only the generic reading; whereas, stage level predicates allow either a generic or an existential reading. Spanish, French and English do not allow there-insertion, as shown in (1a-c). Italian and Portuguese, on the other hand, do permit there-insertion, as seen in (1d-e). (1c) while not acceptable with an existential reading is acceptable with a list reading.

A further distinction relates levels of predication to the distinction between raising verbs and control verbs. Stage level predicates, like raising verbs, do not assign a theta-role. Individual level predicates, like control verbs, do assign a theta-role, meaning "has the property X". Applying this to possessives may provide a means for drawing the distinction between possession and inalienable possession, a distinction that is reflected in the use of the article rather than a possessive with such inalienable objects as body parts. Kratzer (1989) analyzes a group of predicates as lacking an event argument and not assigning a theta-role. Included in this group, which Kratzer calls *individual-level unaccusatives*, is the predicate: *belongs to*. One might assume following Kratzer that possessives, since they denote the relation *belongs to*, are included in this group.

Status as Predicative Adjectives: Moreover, following Bernstein (1993), adjectives that occur predicatively may be modified and may occur in elliptical constructions. This is not the case as has been shown for these possessives. These properties of predicative adjectives, as they apply to possessives, are summarized in the chart below.

Table 2 Predicative Adjectives

Modified	Elliptical	There- insertion	Event argument	Theta- Role
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Fr	no	no	no	no	no
Sp	yes	no	no	no	no
It	yes	no	yes	no	no
Po	yes	no	yes	no	no
En					
pre-	yes	yes	no	no	no
ind	no	yes	no	no	no

I suggest that the reason the possessives do not pattern as adjectives is because of their pronominal status. Semantically possessives both denote a state and a reference. They denote a state of possession and as denotators of a state, they are semantically adjectives. They denote a reference in that they refer to a noun that they substitute for and as such are pronominal.

3. PRONOMINAL STATUS OF POSSESSIVES

Valois (1991) notes the pronoun like properties of the French pronominal possessive. These properties are also evident in Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and English.

3.1 Binding

First, the possessive can be bound by a c-commanding QP, as shown in (21).

- (21). a. La photo de chaque_i photographe de sa_i ville préférée. (Fr)
 The picture of each_i photographer of his_i favorite town.
 b. La foto de cada_i fotógrafo de su_i ciudad favorita. (Sp)
 c. La fotografia di ogni_i fotografo della sua_i città favorita. (It)
 d. A foto de cada_i fotografo da sua_i cidade favorita. (Po)
 e. The picture of each_i photographer of his_i favorite town.

The second property possessives have in common with pronouns is the ability to bind a reflexive, as shown in (22).

- (22). a. Son_i portrait de lui-même_i (Fr)
 his_i picture of himself_i
 b. Su_i foto de el mismo_i (Sp)
 c. La sua_i fotografia di sé stesso_i (It)
 d. ? a sua_i foto de si mesmo_i (Po)
 e. his_i picture of himself_i

3.2 Weak Crossover Effects

A further test for pronominal status involves weak crossover effects. Wh-sentences with the wh-trace co-indexed with a preceding pronoun are ungrammatical. The ungrammaticality decreases in the case of a non c-commanding pronoun as in (23).

- (23).a. Who_i loves his_i mother?
 b. *Who_i does his_i mother love t_i?

Possessives in the languages under discussion vary in their behavior with respect to WCO, as seen in (24).

- (24).a. Quem_i ama a sua_i mãe? (Po)
 *Quem_i a sua_i mãe ama t_i?
 b. Qui_i sa_i mère aime-t-elle? (Fr)
 Qui_i est-ce que sa_i mère aime t_i?
 c. Quien_i ama a su_i madre? (Sp)
 A quien_i ama su_i madre t_i?
 d. Chi_i ama sua_i madre? (It)
 *Chi_i sua_i madre ama t_i?

In Italian, Portuguese, and English WCO effects can be observed; however, these effects are not present in French and Spanish. In Spanish and French because it is possible to get a pair list reading in response to the question, there are no WCO effects with possessives, bringing into question their status as pronouns. If, as claimed by Giorgi and Longobardi (1991:155), possessives are adjectives in Italian, then the WCO effects observed are difficult to explain.

A possible explanation arises, not from their status as adjectives, against which we have argued, but from the availability of stylistic inversion for both Italian, as seen in (25a) and Portuguese, as seen in (25b).

- (25). a. Chi_i amaj sua_i madre t_j t_i? (It)
 b. Quem_i amaj a sua_i mãe t_j t_i? (Po)

Taking into account stylistic inversion, Italian and Portuguese would pattern like French and Spanish with respect to WCO effects.

3.3 Possessives as Pronouns

The pronominal status of English and Romance possessives is similar, as shown in the chart below.

		<u>Table 3 Pronouns</u>		
	Bound by c-commanding QP	Reflexive binding	WCO effects with inversion	
Fr	yes	yes	no	
Sp	yes	yes	no	
It	yes	yes	yes	no
Po	yes	yes(?)	yes	no
En	yes	yes	yes	N/A

Possessives in both English and Romance pattern the same in respect to reflexive binding and being bound by a c-commanding QP. However, these languages divide as to WCO effects. English shows WCO effects; whereas, French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese do not.

3.4 Pronouns and Articles

When considering the possessive forms traditionally classified as pronouns, it is of interest to note that these forms require the article, unlike other pronouns which reject it, as seen in (26).

- (26). a. le mien versus je/me (Fr)
 (the) mine vs. I/me
 b. el mio versus yo/me (Sp)
 (the) mine vs. I/me
 c. il mio versus io/mi (It)
 (the) mine vs. I/me

The possessive element here appears to substitute for a noun not a noun phrase, thus requiring the article to give it argumental status by making it a DP, following Longobardi's (1995) and Stowell's (1987) proposals that arguments are DPs. And, in fact, in Italian, it is exactly the nonargumental positions where the article is dropped. Thus the so-called possessive pronouns are distinctly different from other pronouns.

Another possibility to account for the presence of the article with the "so-called" possessive pronoun would be to treat these constructions as analagous to elliptical expressions in which there is an empty N, as in (27a).

- (27). a. el ec blanco
 b. el ec mio

The article, here, required to bind the variable, following Higginbotham (1987).

While the traditional treatment captured the adjectival nature and the pronominal nature of possessives, the marked division between adjective and pronoun obscures the interaction between these aspects of the possessive. It appears, then, that the distinction between possessives as adjectives or as pronouns cannot be maintained. Possessives as both adjectival and pronominal must be considered independently.

4. POSSESSIVES: ADJECTIVE OR PRONOUN?

If we consider possessives as adjectives in the broadest sense, i.e. as modifiers of a noun, we are unable to fine tune the nature of that modification, since possessives do not conform to the categorical properties of the various subcategories of adjectives.

In respect to their adjectival nature, possessives appear to function more as restricted modifiers. So that "my house" corresponds to "the house that belongs to me." Gross (1986) suggests that the possessive, in fact, corresponds to the form "the definite article . . . relative". In his analysis the possessive "determiner" has as its source a simple phrase, as seen in (28).

- (28).a. La peur qu'il avait était grande.
The fear that he had was great.
b. Sa peur était grande
His fear was great.

This correspondence is reflected in dative possessive constructions, where the notion *belongs to* is expressed by a prepositional phrase, e.g. in French *la maison à moi* (the house to me = my house). The availability of expressing possession either with a possessive element or by a dative construction led Langacker (1968) to suggest that the possessive form was derived from *Le + N + à + Pronoun*, providing one source for both constructions. However, these two constructions (i.e. the pronominal possessive and the prepositional construction) are different. In deriving one from the other we are unable to explain these differences.

4.1 Coordination

One further property common to both adjectives and pronouns that one would expect to find in possessives if they are, as argued, both adjectival and pronominal, is that of coordination. Both adjectives and pronouns can be coordinated, as in (29), respectively.

- (29).a. un chien petit et marron (Fr)
a dog small and brown
b. Tu y yo tendremos que juntarnos la semana que entra. (Sp)
You and I will have to meet the week that follows.
You and I will have to meet next week.

However, these possessive forms can not be coordinated, as shown in (30) for both French and Spanish, respectively.

- (30).a. *mon et ton livre (Fr)
my and your book
b. *mi y tu libro (Sp)

Coordination constructions with possessives, in Spanish, depend on the number of individuals involved; the second occurrence of the possessive can be deleted if the nouns refer to the same individual or aspects of the same thing, as shown in (31).

- (31). a. mi madre y mi padre
my mother and my father (different people)
b. my amigo y colega
my friend and colleague (same person)
c. su paciencia y valor
his patience and courage (aspects of same virtue)

In (31b), there is one referent and thus one possessive. This correlates with the use of the determiner, shown in (32).

- (32). el misterio o enigma del origen
the mystery or enigma of the origin

Postnominal possessives behave differently than their prenominal counterparts in Spanish. The postnominal can be coordinated, as in (33), with the presence/absence of the second article reflecting a difference in interpretation.

- (33). a. la casa tuya y mía
 the house your and my
 b. la casa tuya y la ec mía

In (33a) there is only one house involved; whereas, in (33b) there are two houses.

In respect to French, in coordinated structures the use of the possessive follows that of Spanish, where the possessive is repeated when reference is to different individuals or aspects, as shown in (34).

- (34).a. ma mère et mon père
 1st sg fm mother and 1st sg ms father
 my mother and my father
 b. *ma mère et père
 c. *ma mère et soeur
 my mother and sister
 d. mon ami et collègue
 my friend and colleague

In (34d), one referent/individual is understood; while in (34a-c) there are two individuals involved.

Likewise, in Italian coordinated structures the possessive must be used with each element of the coordination if those elements refer to different "individuals", as shown in (35).

- (35).a. il mio soprabito e il mio cappello
 1st sg ms coat and 1st sg ms hat
 my coat and my hat
 b. *il mio soprabito e cappello

If the coordinated structure refers to one "individual", then only the first instance of the possessive is necessary, as in (36) where the item functions as both a coat and a blanket.

- (36). Questo è il mio soprabito e coperta.
 This is (the) my coat and blanket.

It seems strange that a property held in common by both adjectives and pronouns should not be available to possessives, since they behave at the same time like adjectives and like pronouns.

4.2 Possessives as Predicates

Setting aside for a moment the pronominal properties of possessives, let us reconsider their status as adjectives. Possessive forms are adjectival in only one respect: agreement. The possessive demonstrates agreement with the possessor with respect to person and agreement with the possessed with respect to number and possibly gender. According to Napoli (1989),

gender-number agreement represents evidence of a predication relationship. If we analyze possessives as two-place predicates then both these relationships can be realized. The possessive relationship would then be represented semantically as in (37b).

- (37). a. my book
b. POSS (I, book)

This semantic representation entails two semantic roles for the possessive: the possessor (I) and the possessed (book). In keeping with X'-theory, syntactically (in a first approximation) the possessive would be generated as a head with the possessor as a specifier (external argument - subject) and the possessed as a complement (internal argument).

We have considered the adjectival and pronominal nature of possessives. Despite their failure to satisfy the general properties of adjectives, possessives have been treated as adjectives within the generative framework (Giorgi and Longobardi 1991, Bernstein 1993, among others). Looking at possessives from this perspective it has been shown that possessives behave as adjectives with respect to agreement only.

Considering them as pronouns by looking at their binding properties and weak crossover effects, they appear to be more pronominal in behavior; however to capture both the agreement facts as well as their pronominal reference, I propose that possessives should be viewed as two-place predicates. Following Napoli's (1989) distinction between semantic and thematic roles, the possessive has two semantic roles: possessor and possessed. The adjectival-like agreement reflects this predication relation.

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