

How many dependent possesseees are there?

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The family of verbally dependent descriptions includes (pseudo-)incorporated nominals, bare nouns, and weak definites. Verbally dependent descriptions are nominals structurally integrated into the verbal complex on a level deeper than regular verbal arguments and obliques (Yanovich 2008, Borik & Gehrke 2015, Krifka & Modarresi 2016). One of the crucial characteristics of these nominal expressions is number-neutrality: they can denote either singular or plural entities while being morphologically marked for singular, like the boldfaced weak definite in the example (1) from English. In this presentation, based on the German data, I propose that possesseees in accusative external possessives, henceforth *dependent possesseees* (cf. boldfaced NP in (2)), are verbally dependent and discuss their semantic number. Based on the evidence from their anaphoric uptake, I argue that, unlike other kinds of verbally dependent descriptions, dependent possesseees are not number-neutral.

- (1) *The victims were taken to **the hospital**. They_i were overrun.*
(2) *Sophie küsste Peter **auf die Wange**_i, (zuerst auf die linke und dann auf die rechte).*
Sophie kissed Peter on the cheek first on the left and then on the right
'Sophie kissed Peter **on the cheek** (first on the left one and then on the right one).

The bracketed continuation of the accusative external possessive in (2), which entails that both Peter's cheeks have been kissed, is compatible with morphologically singular dependent possessee in the preceding accusative external possessive. There are two ways to account for that. One possibility is to analyze dependent possesseees as number-neutral. In this case, their number is being interpreted based on the strong contextual bias, as has been previously proposed for other kinds of verbally dependent descriptions (cf. Yanovich 2008, Krifka & Modarresi 2016). Another possibility is to capture dependent possesseees as non-number-neutral nominals but instead as nominals morphologically marked for number. On such an analysis, the felicity of sentences like (2) can be accounted for in terms of accommodation.

In this presentation, I argue that dependent possesseees are not number-neutral. I show that they are not only verbally dependent but also number-dependent. That is to say, due to the nature of body-part relationships, semantic singularity and plurality of dependent possesseees always depend on the singularity and plurality of the possessor: one person always has exactly one nose and three persons will always have three noses altogether. The combination of the two dependencies can lead to mismatches in the morphological and semantic number of dependent possesseees that correctly predict difficulties in their anaphoric uptake (like in (3)) typical for regular non-number-neutral nominals whose morphological and semantic number mismatch. In contrast, the number-neutrality hypothesis does not allow us to explain the anaphoric behavior shown in (3): it overgenerates predicting the possibility of anaphoric uptake by a plural personal pronoun.

- (3) *Sophie küsste die Kinder auf die Wange_i. #Sie_i errötete. / #Sie_i erröteten.*
Sophie kissed the children on the cheek it blushed / they blushed
Int.: 'Sophie kissed the children on the cheek. It blushed. / They (the cheeks) blushed.'

References:

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