**Postnominal adjectives in Polish: a diachronic perspective**

Although typical adjectival modifiers precede nouns in Polish, classifying adjectives (i.e. elements which describe the denoted entity as belonging to a certain class/category/type, cf. Warren 1984) appear in postposition. The aim of this paper is to trace the diachronic source and development of the “reversed” classifying construction and to provide a formal syntactic analysis thereof.

As shown in (1-3), the N+A word order is fully productive in classifying contexts in Modern Polish (unlike in Czech, where the postnominal placement of adjectives is limited to scientific terms and poetry, cf. Veselovská 1995). Rutkowski and Progovac (2005) argue that the surface word order shown in (1a-3a) results from overt N-raising: the noun moves from its underlying position in N° to the head of a higher functional projection located immediately above NP (labelled ClassP – Classification Projection).

The N+A sequences do not go back to Old Slavic. Brajerski (1963) shows that the postnominal placement of modifiers became common in Polish after 1450. However, at that time the N+A word order was not associated with the classifying function. The adjective appeared in postposition when the speaker wanted to be more exact (the postnominal modifier was used to introduce additional information/clarification, it often made the referent definite). Interestingly, the N+A word order triggered another syntactic innovation in Old Polish: Brajerski (1963) gives several examples of fifteenth-century PPs in which the preposition appears both before the head noun and the postnominal modifier – see (4).

According to Brajerski (1963), structures with reiterated prepositions were more or less equivalent to expressions such as “in a grove, that is to say in my grove”. He further suggests that the postnominal word order of modifiers must have been perceived as unusual – possibly formal rather than colloquial. The preposition repetition indicates that the postnominal modifier was in a way “detached” from the head noun, it had an “adjunctive” function. Thus, it seems plausible to analyse it as an appositive DP (or PP, if preceded by a preposition) – see (5-6).

Note that Old Polish postnominal modifiers agreed with the head noun in number, case and gender, although, as proposed above, they belonged to separate DPs. Thus, it could be argued that the noun was present in both DPs but one of its copies had to be elided under identity (the same is true for structures with doubled prepositions) – see (7-8). The deletion analysis finds support in the fact that, as noted by Brajerski (1963), third-person possessives appeared in postposition significantly less frequently than first and second-person possessives. This phenomenon becomes straightforward if we assume that ellipsis must be licensed by adjectival morphology (cf. Lobeck, 1995). Thus, the third-person possessive pronouns jego ‘his’, jej ‘her’, ich ‘their’ cannot act as ellipsis-licensers because they are genitival forms of the personal pronouns on ‘he’, ona ‘she’, oni ‘they’ and do not exhibit adjectival morphology.

The phenomenon of preposition repetition is not grammatical in Modern Polish – see (9). This suggests that postnominal modifiers are no longer perceived as appositive. Neither are they used for clarification/definiteness purposes. Their semantics has been limited to classification and they have been “integrated” into the main DP. It seems that principles of economy triggered a structural simplification: instead of merging two separate DPs in an appositive fashion, in Modern Polish the bi-phrasal structure has been reduced to a single DP. This has lead to the emergence of a new functional projection – Rutkowski and Progovac’s (2005) ClassP. The projection has developed with a specific semantic function (hosting a strong semantic feature which needs to be checked overtly). Interestingly, such a change has not taken place in Russian although examples such as (10) suggest that the appositive placement of adnominal modifiers was possible also in Old Russian.

In Polish, the structural simplification described above made the ellipsis of one of the occurrences of the head noun redundant. The adjectival modifier can both agree with the head noun (which suggests a spec-head relation) and appear after that noun (which makes the structure classifying) because part of N-raising has been made overt (note that covert N-raising is required independently for theoretical reasons). Therefore, there is no need for the complicated appositive base generation mechanism: the postnominal word order that at some point became associated with classification can now be derived in a more economical way.
Data:

(1a) oprogramowanie antywirusowe  
software antiviral  
‘antiviral software’

(1b) *antywirusowe oprogramowanie

(2a) mecz piłkarski  
match football-ADJ  
‘football match’

(2b) *piłkarski mecz

(3a) papier toaletowy  
paper toilet-ADJ  
‘toilet paper’

(3b) *toaletowy papier

(4) w gaju w mojem (Old Polish, 1477)  
in grove-LOC in my-LOC  
‘in my grove’

(5)    DP
      DP  DP
       \  \   
gaj  mój

(6)    PP
      PP  PP
       \  \   
w gaju  w mojem

(7)    DP
      DP  DP
       \  \   
gaj  mój  gaj

(8)    PP
      PP  PP
       \  \   
w gaju  w mojem  gaju

(9a) w moim gaju  
in my-LOC grove-LOC  
‘in my grove’

(9b) *w gaju w moim  
in grove-LOC in my-LOC

(10) iz kamnja iz černago (Old Russian, 1475)  
taken from Yadroff 1999  
from stone-GEN from black-GEN  
‘from black stone’

Selected References:


