

POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVES IN MODERN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Haby Gueye

Université Cheikh Anta Diop- Dakar

hgueyeaby@hotmail.com

Résumé

Cet article est consacré à l'étude des adjectifs possessifs en anglais. En grammaire, les adjectifs possessifs jouent un rôle important et apparaissent comme des déterminants du nom. À travers cette étude, nous avons remarqué que l'ordre des mots est très important pour comprendre le fonctionnement des adjectifs possessifs mais aussi, la sémantique permet de savoir le sens que véhicule chaque adjectif possessif. Cet article s'inscrit dans le cadre d'étudier les adjectifs possessifs sur le plan syntaxique puis sémantique afin de déterminer leur fonctionnement dans le système linguistique anglais.

Mots clés : adjectifs possessifs, anglais, syntaxique, sémantique.

Abstract

This article is about the study of possessive adjectives in English. Possessive adjectives play an important role in English and appear as noun determiners. Through this article, we notice that word order is very important to understand the functioning of possessive adjectives but also semantics allows us to know the meaning behind each possessive adjective. This work will allow us to study them in the syntactic and semantic levels in order to discover their functioning in the English linguistic system.

Keywords: possessive adjectives, English, syntactic, semantic.

Introduction

According to the Larousse dictionary, grammar is defined as the full description of language. It is in fact, the root of language and is mandatory for its good understanding. The main point is accuracy and there is no accuracy outside grammar. So grammar has several categories like the verb, the noun etc., Each category can have subcategories. This work is about the study of possessive adjectives in modern English Grammar. English is a West Germanic language which share some properties with its related languages like German, to place the determiner before the determined noun (Adamczewski, 1982:271). Possessive

adjectives are linked to the noun. So what is their real role in the utterances? Where do they come from? Do they change from singular to plural? What is the semantic value of “*your*” in English? The third person in singular for the possessive adjectives corresponds to three operators: *his*, *her* and *its*, so what is the semantic value of each of them? To answer to all these questions, we have to base on the grammar of operations as argued by Henri Adamczewski. It is a unifying and an explicative theory to language and languages (Adamczewski, 1982:7). Then we have to base on the context to detect the real richness of English possessive adjectives. For the achievement of this work, a lot of research has been made in some libraries for the books and net sources as well. The analysis of the data is very rich because it allows us to determine the order of elements in the utterances, but also to find the semantic value of possessive adjectives. For the good understanding of this work, we are going to introduce possessive adjectives in English first. As grammar shows us how words are arranged to get meaningful utterances, the second part will be about syntactic aspects of possessive adjectives and the last part will deal with the semantic values of possessive adjectives.

1. Possessive adjectives in English

English is a West Germanic language from Anglo-saxon kingdoms of England. The study of the noun has an important place in English grammar. Our topic which is about possessive adjectives in English, play an outstanding part in grammar. Possessive adjectives in English are: *my*, *your*, *his*, *her*, *its*, *our*, *your* and *their*. Indeed, Possessive adjectives are related to personal pronouns. Personal pronouns in English are *I*, *you*, *he/she/it*, *we*, *you*, and *their*. Respectively, first person, second person and third person in singular, plus first person, second and third persons in plural. For each personal pronoun in English, corresponds a possessive adjective. Let’s consider the following chart:

Possessive adjectives

Personal pronouns	Possessive adjectives
I	My
You	Your
He	His
She	Her
It	Its
We	Our
They	Their

The third person in singular for possessive adjectives corresponds to three operators: *bis*, *her* and *its*. So we need to understand the syntactic aspects of all those elements but also their meaning because they can sometimes convey a meaning other than possession. Possessive adjectives are operators of the noun. They come from the genitive of personal pronouns in old English (Adamczewski, 1992:145). We can have a chart for the possessive adjectives in old English and in modern English.

Old English

modern English

mīn	My
Oīn	Your
His	His
Hiere	Her
His	Its
Úre	Our
Éower	Your
Hira	Their

In old English, possessive adjectives were genitives of personal pronouns. So language is evolving and the changing form of languages makes number of the possessive adjectives from old English to change in modern English.

So possessive adjectives don't change from singular to plural. In English, possessive adjectives refer to the gender and the number of the possessor, as in the example:

His hand

The possessive adjective shows that the possessor is masculine.

Another example:

Her possessions

The possessive adjective *her*, shows that the possessor is feminine

Then possessive adjectives in the third person, concord with the gender of the possessor.

In the grammar of operations, word order is very essential, then, to understand more the topic, we are going to determine the order of elements in English utterances with possessive adjectives.

2. Word order with possessive adjectives in English

In English grammar, word order is by no means random. Grammar refers to a system of functioning of the language that defines how words are classified in the utterances.

Now let's consider the following examples:

Your presence

Poss.adj. N

In this above example, the possessive adjective *your*, is placed before the noun, it is the determiner of the noun *presence*. We have to deal with a singular noun.

Your letters

Poss.adj.

This example presents first, the possessive adjective *your*, followed by the plural noun *letters*. The possessive adjective determines the noun *letters*.

My heart

Poss.adj. N

The possessive adjective comes first, then we have the noun *heart* just after it. It is about a singular noun.

My legs

Poss.adj. N

We have the possessive adjective, first person singular which is placed before the noun *legs*. The latter is a plural noun. The possessive adjective has to determine the noun.

From the above examples, we notice that the possessive adjective is always placed before the noun and it determines it. We notice also that possessive adjectives do not concord in number, however the noun that follows it varies from singular to plural, to determine the number. Now let's study the semantic value of the possessive adjectives in English.

3. Semantic study of possessive adjectives in English

Semantics is what determines the meaning in the context. It is really important and plays an outstanding part in grammar.

In the concise handbook of linguistics, semantics is defined as the study of the meanings of speech forms (Steible, 1967:110).

Let's consider the following examples for the semantic analysis of possessive adjectives in English.

My heart (1a)

My chairs(1b)

In (1a), the noun that is placed after the possessive adjective “*heart*” is a singular noun. This helps us a lot to get the meaning. In this utterance, it is about the noun “*heart*” that belongs to the possessive adjective “*my*”, as in (1b), the noun determined “*chairs*” is a plural noun, then, there are more than one chair, that belong to the possessive adjective “*my*”.

Your hand(2a)

Your brothers(2b)

In (2a), the possessive adjective *your* determines the singular noun *hand*, then it is about a part/body relationship. As far as the meaning is

concerned, it is about one hand that is part of the body of the possessive adjective *your*. In (2b), the noun determined is a plural noun *brothers*, then it is about more than one brother that is linked with the possessive adjective *your*. As for the possessive adjective *your*, it can design either one person or more than one person.

His office (3a)

His cheeks (3b)

The possessive adjective *his* doesn't change. To really get the meaning, we have to base on the noun that is placed after it. Then, in (3a), it is about one office that is for the masculine possessive adjective *his*, in (3b), it is about the two cheeks of the masculine possessor *his*.

Her husband (4a)

Her eyes (4b)

The possessive adjective *her*, shows that the possessor is feminine. The noun determined will clarify the meaning. In (4a), it is about only one husband who is linked with the possessive adjective *her*. In (4b), it is about the plural noun eyes and the eyes pertain to *her*.

Each life has its share (5a)

Our society with its divisions (5b)

In (5a), the noun that is determined, *share*, is in singular, in (5b), *divisions* is a plural noun.

Our circle (6a)

Our uncles (6b)

The noun determined in (6a) is in singular and shows that it is about one circle for the possessive adjective *our*. In (6b), the noun determined shows that it is about the uncles linked with the possessive adjective *our* that includes more than one person.

Their comfort (7a)

Their husbands (7b)

The singular noun in (7a), comfort, shows that we have to deal with the comfort of the possessive adjective *their* that includes more than one person .in (7b), it is about the husbands of more than one woman. The possessive adjective *their* includes more than one person.

Conclusion

Possessive adjectives are operators of the noun that play an important role in English grammar. In fact, they determine the nouns that are placed after them. They are indeed linked with personal pronouns. In old English, possessive adjectives were genitive forms of personal pronouns. Then to each personal pronoun, corresponds a possessive adjective as a genitive form. So language is evolving. Some of the possessive adjectives change morphologically from old English to modern English. With the grammar of operations, the order of words is an important point to know the functioning of possessive adjectives and to know the place of each element in the utterances. In each utterance, the syntactic value responds to the shared property of Germanic languages like German, English, to place the determiner before the determined. Then the possessive adjective is placed before the noun and serves as a determiner for the latter. Possessive adjectives do not change but the noun placed just after them change in number, from singular to plural. From that point, we can say that determining the order of words with possessive adjectives, allows us to get the semantic value of utterances. The possessive adjective *your* refers to either the possessive adjective of the second person in singular to include only one person, or in plural to include more than one person. The possessive adjectives *his* and *her* inform us about the possessor, if it is a male or a female. *Its* refers most of the time to a thing, an animal etc., The kind of relationship in the utterances with possessive adjectives can be possession, a part/whole relationship, a link between a husband and his wife etc.,

Bibliography

- Aarts Bas** (2001), *English syntax and argumentation*, New York, Palgrave.
Adamczewski Henri et Delmas Claude (1982), *Grammaire Linguistique de L'anglais*, Paris, Armand Colin.
Adamczewski Henri et Gabilan Jean Pierre (1992), *Les clés de la grammaire anglaise*, Paris, Armand Colin, 15-35 p.

- Adamczewski Henri et Keen, D.** (1973). *Phonétique et phonologie de l'anglais contemporain*, Paris, Armand Colin.
- Adamczewski Henri et Gabilan, Jean Pierre** (1995), *Déchiffrer la grammaire anglaise*, Paris, Didier.
- Adamczewski Henri** (1991), *Le français déchiffré, clé du langage et des langues*, Paris, Armand Colin.
- De- Lepine, S.B.** (2000), *La grammaire Anglaise de l'étudiant*, Paris, Ophrys.
- Steible Daniel** (1967), *Concise handbook of linguistics*, New York, Philosophical library.
- Tamine J. G.** (2012), *La grammaire- Syntaxe*, Tome 2, 5^{ème} édition, Paris, Armand Colin.
- Van Valin Jr.** (2001), *An introduction to syntax*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.