

Proposal

Title - Animacy and Alienability: A Reconsideration of English Possession

Program of Study – Teaching English as a Second Language

Presentation Type – Choose one of the following: PowerPoint

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Category Experimental (Theoretical)

Abstract example: Current scholarship on English possessive constructions, the s-genitive (*John's father*) and the *of*-construction (*the father of John*), largely ignores the possessive relationships inherent in certain English compound nouns (*mountaintop*). Scholars agree that, in general, an animate possessor predicts the s-genitive while an inanimate possessor predicts the *of*-construction. However, the current literature rarely discusses noun compounds, such as *the table leg*, that also express possessive relationships. While not all noun + noun compounds imply possession, many do. For example, *the tree trunk* implies a possessive relationship between the tree and its trunk as in *the tree's trunk* or *the trunk of the tree*. Other compounds, though, lack this impression. For instance, *the paper cup* does not imply possession but rather material- the cup made out of paper (not the cup belonging to the paper). However, because a compound is a single word and thus its primary function is not to express possession, it cannot be considered as a true possessive construction. Thus, the question remains as from where the pseudo-possessive semantics originate. The noun compounds that imply possession seem to exhibit relationships prototypical of inalienable possession such as body part, part whole, and spatial relationships. An inalienable possessive relationship involves a possessor and a possessum that have an inseparable association such as the aforementioned relationships. Additionally, the juxtaposition of the possessor and possessum in the compound construction is reminiscent of inalienable

possession in other languages. Therefore, this paper proposes that inalienability, a phenomenon not thought to be relevant in English, actually imbues noun compounds, whose components exhibit an inalienable relationship, with possessive semantics.

Christian worldview integration:

For my research, I began with the assumption that language is God's gift and God's design. When one more deeply examines the complexities of linguistic structure, it is obvious that for human beings to be able to use language is actually a wonder. It is evidence that man is made in God's image and is thus able to reason and be in relationship. In this research I explore the hidden implications that native speakers have within their unconscious knowledge, making it possible to choose the correct linguistic structure- in this case, the correct possessive construction. The possessive constructions are technically in variation with one another, but native speakers have a clear understanding of which one is preferred. This perception does not come from learning- parents do not teach their children when to use the *s*-genitive versus the *of*-construction and are likely themselves unaware of why they use one over the other. How is this acquisition of knowledge possible simply from being exposed to this linguistic environment? If you rule out God's wisdom as an explanation, you are simply left with an absurdity.

Furthermore, my research demonstrates the need for people to explore more deeply and not simply judge something based on its surface representation. We live in a culture where everything needs to be fast and easy and accessible. People tend to ignore subtleties by focusing on generalities or surface impressions and do not take the time to penetrate the surface. My research examines the underlying principles of English possession, demonstrating the wealth of knowledge to be found by simply looking further. By delving more deeply even into the

intricacies of language, we can learn more about God, His creation of language and how He has wired humans to perceive the world and then linguistically convey those impressions.