

# SUFFIXAUFNAHME OR THE POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVE IN SERBIAN?

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## **Abstract**

*Suffixaufnahme* occurs in various language families including Caucasian, Indo-European and Australian, and refers to the phenomenon of suffix-duplication; that is, the repetition of the marking of the head noun on the attributive noun in the genitive case. The possessive adjective of Serbian, a Slavonic language, exhibits similarities to the *Suffixaufnahme* constructions; however, it does not share all the features associated with the prototypical *Suffixaufnahme*. Here, these similarities and differences are explored and analysed.

## **1. Introduction**

In this paper I look at the possessive adjective construction, formed from nouns through suffixation, and acting on the following noun to describe it, as well as to indicate possession, i.e. *Sreten* (N) + *ov-a* (possessive suffix, feminine) gives *Sretenova violina* (Sreten.NOM.SG.FEM.POSS violin.NOM.SG.FEM) ‘Sreten’s violin’, where *Sretenova* describes the violin but also shows that Sreten is the possessor of the violin. As discussed in the literature, the possessive adjective of the Slavic languages is often compared to *Suffixaufnahme*, or Suffix Copying, due to the many similarities between them. It is quite common that attributive constituents, particularly adjectives, agree with their head nouns in case. However, it is not common for nouns in an attributive relation to agree with their head nouns in case. This agreement, termed Suffix Copying, *Suffixaufnahme* in German, by Franz Nikolaus Finck (in Plank 1990:1039) is shown in the following example from Yidiny, an Australian language, where the last suffix on the attributive noun, that is *Ngu*, is a copy of the case suffix of the head noun.

- (1) *wagal-ni-Ngu*    *gudaga-Ngu*  
wife-GEN-ERG    dog-ERG  
‘(my) wife’s dog’

Despite numerous debates as to the type of structure, Corbett (1987b:305) claims that the possessive adjective is a derivational word since a change of word-class membership is involved. Although the possessive adjective (as opposed to the adnominal Genitive) has the widest range in Upper Sorbian among the Slavic languages, Dmitriev claims that it is also highly productive in Serbian (in Corbett 1987b:305), while both Stevanović (1991) and Ivić (1986) state that it is the norm when reference is made to a specific human.

Corbett (1995:266) claims that the possessive adjective in Upper Sorbian expresses the same meaning that is conveyed by the Genitive case in many other languages. The same applies to Serbian, and it would be rather unusual in this language to find an adnominal Genitive referring to a definite person or a person with whom the speaker is closely associated. This is exemplified in (2) below.

- (2) *knjiga*                            *od*        *Marka*  
book.NOM.SG.FEM    from    Mark.GEN.SG.MASC  
‘Mark’s book’

The above example cannot refer to such expressions as ‘Mark’s gospel’ in English. It would be more appropriate to say:

- (3) *Markova* *knjiga*  
 Mark.NOM.SG.FEM.POSS book.NOM.SG.FEM  
 ‘Mark’s book’

In the above example, the suffix *-ov-* is used in the formation of the possessive adjective. As previously mentioned, possessive adjectives are formed from nouns by suffixation. The criterion for the selection of a suffix is based on gender. Accordingly, feminine nouns take the suffix *-in-*, so *žena* ‘woman’ gives *žen-in-* ‘woman’s’, while masculine nouns take the suffix *-ov-*, thus, *dečak* ‘boy’ gives *dečak-ov-* ‘boy’s’. Masculine nouns ending in *-a* behave like feminine nouns by taking the suffix *-in-*, thus, *sudija* ‘judge.MASC’ gives *sudij-in-* ‘judge’s’. Another masculine suffix is *-ev-*, as in *car-ev-* ‘tsar’s’.

Apart from the possessive suffix, the possessive adjective in Serbian also carries agreement in case, number and gender, so that, in this respect, it behaves like any other adjective. The obvious syntactic distinction between a possessive adjective and an adnominal Genitive is in the order in which they are found in a sentence. Thus, the adnominal Genitive follows the noun, while the possessive adjective precedes it (Corbett 1995:267), as shown, respectively, in examples (2) and (3) above.

In terms of morphology, a possessive adjective is distinguished from the adnominal Genitive by the masculine suffix *-ov-*, or the feminine suffix *-in-* (see above). Another distinction is that any of the cases in Serbian can mark the possessive adjective, as in (4) below, while an adnominal Genitive can be marked only by the Genitive case, that is, there can be no other case following (see example (2))

- (4) *o* *Markovim* *knjigama*  
 about Mark.LOC.PL.FEM.POSS book.LOC.PL.FEM  
 ‘about Mark’s books’

## 2. Restrictions on possessive adjectives

Two types of restriction on possessive adjectives can be observed (Corbett 1995:267-271). One deals with its formation, and the other with its use. In this section I will discuss both types.

Corbett (1995:268) claims that in Upper Sorbian some of the restrictions - formation are morphological, so that possessive adjectives can only be formed from certain types of stems. Such a restriction would also apply to the formation of possessive adjectives in Serbian, though it is not strictly adhered to. Both female surnames and names ending in *-ki* do not allow the formation of possessive adjective. Colloquially though, possessive adjectives are formed from both. Thus, a female surname such as *Jovanović*, would take a feminine suffix *-ka*, followed by the possessive suffix *-in-*, to give *Jovanović-k-in-* ‘Jovanović.NOM.SG.FEM.POSS’. Similarly, a name such as *Mušicki* would give *Mušickij-ev-* ‘Mušicki.NOM.SG.MASC.POSS’.

Another type of restriction on the formation of possessive adjectives refers to the singular number, that is, if the referent is not singular, the Genitive case must be used (Fasske, in Corbett 1995:268). The above number restriction applies to Serbian as well, and although no other restrictions apply to the formation of possessive adjectives when the referent is human, some restrictions apply to animal referents. The following examples show the unacceptability of plural referents in the possessive adjective construction, in (5), and the application of the Genitive case in (6).

- (5) \* *naših* *dečakova* *lopta*  
 our.GEN.PL boy.SG.FEM.POSS ball.SG.FEM  
 ‘our boys’ ball’

- (6) *naših dečaka lopta*  
 our.GEN.PL boy.GEN.PL ball.SG.FEM  
 ‘the ball of our boys’

Similarly, Fasske (in Corbett 1995:268) states that the referent must be definite, so that the possessive adjective *boys* is specific and not generic, as illustrated in (7) below.

- (7) \* *nekog dečakova lopta*  
 some.GEN.SG boy.SG.FEM.POSS ball.SG.FEM  
 ‘some boy’s ball’

All of the above mentioned restrictions are neatly summarised in the two hierarchies proposed by Corbett (1987b:324). He suggests that the higher a referent is on each of these hierarchies, the more likely it is that a possessive adjective will be formed. The hierarchies are as follows,

human > animal > inanimate  
 definite > indefinite

This is true for Serbian, where there are no restrictions on the formation of possessive adjectives when the referent is human. However, this does not apply to all animals, that is, one can say *slon-ov-o uvo* ‘elephant’s ear’ but not \**mrav-ov-a noga* ‘ant’s leg’. Similarly, if the referent is indefinite, the possessive adjective cannot be formed and the Genitive case is used instead.

The most significant restriction in the use of possessive adjectives in Serbian is that they cannot have dependents. This is illustrated below.

- (8) \* *moga bratova žena*  
 my.GEN.SG.MASC brother.NOM.SG.FEM.POSS wife.NOM.SG.FEM  
 ‘my brother’s wife’

The possessive adjective *bratova*, formed from the noun *brat* ‘brother’, agrees with the head noun in case, number and gender, while *moga* ‘my.GEN.SG.MASC’, being a possessive pronoun, cannot mark another possessive. A Genitive construction, given in (9), would be used instead.

- (9) *žena moga brata*  
 wife.NOM.SG.FEM my.GEN.SG.MASC brother.GEN.SG.MASC  
 ‘my brother’s wife’

### 3. The possessive adjective and Suffix Copying

In this section I look at both the possessive adjective and Suffix Copying in order to ascertain whether the possessive adjective exhibits any of the features of Suffix Copying. Since the characteristics of the possessive adjective have been discussed in (1.1), I will now turn to the characteristics of the Suffix Copying.

Plank (1990:1039) defines Suffix Copying in terms of agreement, so that a noun in an attributive relation agrees with its head noun in case. Corbett (1995:272) interprets this as follows: ‘Specifically, the attributive relation is marked by case (normally genitive) on the attributive noun and this has a second, agreeing case marker.’ Thus, the attributive noun appears to have a double inflectional marking. I will now analyse the Serbian example, given in (3), and reproduced in (10) below, to find out if it indeed has the double inflectional marking.



discussion see Popović 1993), where the definite adjectives have been taken to represent the paradigm of adjectives, including the possessive adjective. This is illustrated below, in the declension of an adjective, possessive adjective and a noun, all of which are singular in number and of masculine gender.

(13)	<i>žuzi</i>	<i>vuk-ov</i>	<i>jelen</i>
	‘yellow’	‘wolf’s’	‘deer’
NOM	<i>žuti</i>	<i>vukov</i>	<i>jelen</i>
VOC	<i>žuti</i>	<i>vukov</i>	<i>jelene</i>
DAT	<i>žutom</i>	<i>vukovom</i>	<i>jelenu</i>
LOC	<i>žutom</i>	<i>vukovom</i>	<i>jelenu</i>
INSTR	<i>žutim</i>	<i>vukovim</i>	<i>jelenom</i>
ACC	<i>žutog</i>	<i>vukovog</i>	<i>jelena</i>
GEN	<i>žutog</i>	<i>vukovog</i>	<i>jelena</i>

The above illustration clearly shows that adjectives and possessive adjectives indeed share identical endings for most cases, and when they do not, it is due to the phonological patterns of Serbian.

The second argument presented in Corbett (1995) deals with the ordering of suffixes. Corbett (1995:274) claims that ‘derivational affixes are typically found ‘inside’ inflectional affixes (closer to the root)’. Since the stem in Serbian is followed by the derivational affix *-ov-* for masculine and *-in-* for feminine, which, in turn, is followed by an inflectional suffix, it is clear that, at least in this regard, Serbian supports the derivational analysis.

The above discussion shows that the formation of the possessive adjective shares some features of both inflectional and derivational morphology. Corbett (1995:275) suggests that rather than assigning the possessive adjective to one of the structures given in (11a-b), it should be placed somewhere in between. This fact alone clearly indicates that the possessive adjective exhibits some Suffixaufnahme but not enough to represent a standard Suffixaufnahme construction.

#### 4. Discussion

Some further issues need to be discussed before the question of whether possessive adjectives exhibit any Suffix Copying in Serbian is answered.

First of all, Corbett (1995:275-76) raises the issue of whether the possessive adjective is a noun or a noun phrase, claiming that noun phrases rather than just nouns are closer to prototypical Suffix Copying. As mentioned previously, adjectives in Serbian, including possessive adjectives, agree with the nouns they modify in case, number and gender, which clearly indicates that the whole noun phrase is marked for case, number and gender. This is shown in (14) below, where the possessive adjective *Bojanova* ‘Bojan.NOM.SG.FEM.POSS’ is a noun phrase, since it refers to the house.

(14)	<i>Ovo je Markova</i>	<i>kuća,</i>	<i>a ovo je</i>
	this is Mark.NOM.SG.FEM.POSS	house.NOM.SG.FEM	conj this is
	<i>Bojanova.</i>		
	Bojan.NOM.SG.FEM.POSS		
	‘This is Mark’s house, and this is Bojan’s.’		

Another question raised by Corbett (1995:275-76) is whether possessive adjectives can be formed from noun phrases, as well as from nouns. The latter has been illustrated above, so I

will now look at noun phrases. Corbett (1995:275) states that ‘it is normally assumed that NPs, not nouns, control anaphoric pronouns’. Since I have already established that the root of the possessive adjective in Serbian is a noun phrase, I will now show that possessive adjectives can be the controlling agents of anaphoric pronouns.

(15) *Ovo je Mirjanina kuća, a ovo*  
 this is Mirjana.NOM.SG.FEM.POSS house.NOM.SG.FEM conj this  
*Markova On je jedinac.*  
 Mark.NOM.SG.FEM.POSS he.NOM.SG.MASC is only child.  
 ‘This is Mirjana’s house, and this is Mark’s. He is an only child.’

The above discussion clearly shows that the root of the possessive adjective in Serbian is a noun phrase, though restricted in that it consists of a bare noun. As mentioned previously, the possessive adjective, whose root is a case marked noun phrase, thus exhibits some properties characteristic of Suffix Copying.

Other constructions discussed in Corbett (1995), such as ‘attraction’, according to which it is possible for the attributive modifier to take on the same features as those found in the possessive adjective and the head noun, and ‘recursion’ do not occur with the possessive adjectives in Serbian.

## 5. Conclusion

It can be concluded from the above discussion that due to the restrictions on use, the lack of constructions characteristic of Suffix Copying, such as recursion (Corbett 1995:277), and mostly its fusional morphology which prevents the free combining of formatives, Serbian shares very few characteristics with Suffix Copying. The main argument against the possessive adjectives in Serbian exhibiting Suffix Copying characteristics is summarised below. Possessive adjectives in Serbian bear a layer of derivational marking, that is, masculine suffix *-ov-* or feminine suffix *-in-*, followed by a layer of inflectional marking. This is contrasted with words that bear two layers of inflectional marking, the outer layer being an example of Suffix Copying, or Suffixaufnahme in German.

## APPENDIX

The following is a list of abbreviations used in the data presented in this paper:

ACC Accusative	GEN = Genitive	NOM = Nominative
DAT = Dative	INSTR = Instrumental	POSS = Possessive
ERG = Ergative	LOC Locative	VOC = Vocative
FEM = Feminine	PL Plural	
MASC = Masculine	SG = Singular	

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