

On How Language Coexistence May Influence Syntax: Elite-governed Change of Word Order in Polish Adjectival Expressions¹

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0. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to show an example of how sociolinguistic factors may influence development of syntactic structures. Two stages in the history of Polish nominal expressions will be examined: the fifteenth-century word order of adjectival elements will be compared to that found in Modern Polish. It is crucial to note that, in the fifteenth century, most educated Poles spoke Latin fluently since it was the language of Catholicism and education. This paper shows that the linguistic coexistence of Old Polish and Latin was the main driving force of an important syntactic innovation: namely, the emergence of postnominal/appositive adjectival modifiers, which first appeared in Old Polish translations of Latin religious texts and started to be commonly used in the second half of the fifteenth century. This innovation was not related to any change in the lexicon of Old Polish, which means that, contrary to most traditional approaches to linguistic borrowing, a syntactic construction may be borrowed even if no lexical borrowing is involved. Interestingly, what entered Old Polish as an elite/learned stylistic feature later developed into a regular phrasal configuration associated the semantic value of classification.

1. Elite-governed Language Change

In this paper, I will follow van Marle's 2003 approach to linguistic borrowing and calquing. He assumes that one of the most important sociocultural parameters of a language contact situation is whether the speakers of the host language constitute an elite group (in other words, van Marle 2003 points out that the question "who is borrowing" is as important as "what is being borrowed"). Thanks to this parameter, we are able to

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distinguish between two processes that have often been subsumed under the label “borrowing”, but in fact should be analyzed as completely different phenomena. Van Marle 2003 refers to them as *borrowing proper* and *contact-induced elaboration*. The most important characteristics of these two mechanisms of language change are listed in (1) and (2), respectively.

(1) *Borrowing proper*:

- non-elite-governed (affects the language of the whole speech community);
- a “natural”/“unconscious” phenomenon (words are borrowed because they are needed in everyday communication);
- accompanied by phonological adaptation;
- does not change the “hard core” of the host language (i.e. the phonology and syntax); instead, influences the most flexible part (the lexicon).

(2) *Contact-induced elaboration (CIE)*:

- elite-governed (limited to a cultured, literate subset of the speech community);
- an “unnatural”/“artificial”/“conscious” phenomenon (members of the elite want to elaborate their native language, or, to put it differently, remodel their language on the basis of its culturally prestigious counterpart);
- stylistically and pragmatically conditioned (limited to formal language; does not directly affect spontaneous speech);
- not necessarily lexical (if words or idioms are borrowed, they are not adapted phonologically, i.e. they are not incorporated into the native lexicon);
- usually targets grammatical/syntactic constructions;
- involves copying/calquing;
- often linked to writing and the written register of the host language.

Van Marle’s 2003 contact-induced elaboration is parallel to what Pountain 1998 calls *learnèd influence*. The latter is defined as “a special case of language contact between an educated minority of speakers of a language and a prestige vehicle of culture” (see Pountain 1998:160). As shown above, van Marle’s 2003 analysis of CIE opposes the traditional view that, as he puts it, “words are always borrowed first” (p.127), i.e. that no contact-induced syntactic change is possible without lexical borrowing (for more details, see van Marle’s 2003 discussion of Thomason and Kaufman 1988).

Van Marle 2003 gives several examples of languages that were subject to CIE at some point in their history, including Ottoman Turkish (affected lexically and grammatically by Arabic and Persian), the “frenchified” variety of Dutch spoken by the Flemish bourgeois (with a significant influence of French grammar), and the literary varieties of national languages in Western Europe (which were in a way artificially created in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and incorporated many elements of Latin syntax, such as certain participial and infinitival constructions). In the above cases,

the language of the elite was very different from the dialects used by the uneducated masses; however, many of the contact-induced influences gradually percolated into the standard spoken varieties. Pountain 1998 explains the fact that some elite-governed grammatical elaborations find their way to non-elite varieties by assuming that such elaborations turn out to be “useful”, or, to phrase it differently, to fill a gap in the grammar of the language that they become part of. Pountain 1998:166 proposes that languages borrow because of structural need, to gain structural advantage, or to increase expressive possibilities. He also points out that languages usually copy only those grammatical features which are salient (different from analogous structures in the host language, structurally marked). Pountain 1998 suggests that if there is no structural advantage to be gained or the feature in question is not easily perceptible, a learned grammatical influence is unlikely to percolate to the language of the non-elite majority of the speech community.

As noted by Pountain 1998 and van Marle 2003, the main prestige source of learned/elite-governed influence in the history of the Western European languages was Latin. The situation was similar in Poland: five hundred years ago, the knowledge of Latin was very common among the elite of the Polish society. In the remaining part of this paper, I will show that the model of elite-governed/learned influence proposed by Pountain 1998 and van Marle 2003 can be used to account for the historical development of Polish adjectival structures.

2. Postnominal Modifiers in Old Polish

Slavic adjectival modifiers typically precede the head noun that they are attached to. However, Brajerski’s 1963 analysis of Old Polish reveals a more complex pattern. He provides a detailed account of the word order of possessive pronouns (which, in terms of morphology and syntax, pattern with regular adjectives in Slavic), based on a thorough examination of fifteenth-century court records from the Mazovia region, i.e. the region around Warsaw (the language of court testimonies being probably the best reflection of the spoken variety of Old Polish). Brajerski 1963 points out that a new syntactic structure emerged in the grammar of Polish in the late 1400s (at least in the Mazovia region): in the first half of the fifteenth century, postnominal modifiers were very rare (they appear in 9% of all the structures that he analyzed); however, the postnominal word order is used much more often after 1450, when the N-A sequences amount to 77% of all modified nominals, and it remains common in the sixteenth century. Thus, structures such as (3) must be treated as examples of an innovation that entered the syntax of general Polish in the second half of the fifteenth century.

- (3) gaj mój
 grove-NOM my-NOM
 ‘my grove’

Historical linguists (see e.g. Brajerski 1959, 1963, Smolińska 1983, Rospond 2003, Kuryłowicz 2005, among many others) seem to be unanimous that this syntactic innovation was triggered by Latin, in which (unlike in Slavic) adjectives typically appeared in postposition. This influence most likely resulted from the fact that early Polish religious texts were usually translations; thus, the postnominal word order of adnominal modifiers might have been mechanically copied from the Latin original by the translator. Brajerski 1963 points out that such calquing was very common as early as in the fourteenth century; however, at that time its influence on the spoken variety of Old Polish must have been rather limited because, as mentioned above, the postnominal placement of adjectival modifiers is very rare in those court testimonies which were taken before 1450.

Compare the pairs of expression in (4a-b) and (5a-b), taken from *Pater Noster* (the Lord's Prayer) and its earliest known translation into Polish, an anonymous manuscript written in 1375 (the Old Polish examples in (4b) and (5b) are given in the original spelling, see Michałowska 1995:270):

- (4a) pater noster [Latin]
father our
'our father'
- (4b) otcze nas [Old Polish]
father our
'our father'
- (5a) panem nostrum quotidianum [Latin]
bread our daily
'our daily bread'
- (5b) chleb nas wsedni [Old Polish]
bread our daily
'our daily bread'

It is clear that the (b) examples are exact calques of their Latin counterparts. In colloquial Old Polish, both possessive adjectives (such as *nas* 'our') and regular attributes (such as *wsedni* 'daily') were always placed before the noun (cf. e.g. Rospond 2003:197-198). Interestingly, before the second half of the fifteenth century the postnominal placement of adjectives was not used consistently even in exact translations from Latin. Sentence (6b) and examples (4b-5b) come from the same Old Polish translation of the Lord's Prayer; however, the word order of the two occurrences of the adjectival possessive pronoun in (6b) does not match the Latin original – see (6a):

- (6a) Et dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris. [Latin]
and forgive us trespasses our as and we forgive trespassers our
'And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.'

- (6b) Otpusczi nam nasse wini jaco mi otpuszczami nassym winowatczem. [Old Polish]
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive our trespassers
'And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.'

The postnominal placement of adjectives seems to be optional in early translations, which suggests that its use was not grammaticalized. However, as shown by Brajerski 1963, this situation changed in the second half of the fifteenth century, when the postpositional word order was rigidified.

3. Postnominal Modifiers in Modern Polish

Interestingly, the postnominal placement of adjectival modifiers has remained part of Polish grammar until today (even though Latin has no socio-cultural influence on the present-day Polish language). However, this word order has become associated with a specific semantic function: pre-modifiers are regular attributes, whereas post-modifiers classify the head noun as belonging to a certain category/type/class (see Rutkowski and Progovac 2005, for a more detailed analysis of relevant Polish data, and Warren 1984, for a discussion of the notion of adjectival classification). The qualifying vs. classifying dichotomy is illustrated in (7) and (8), respectively (examples taken from Rutkowski and Progovac 2005, discussed also in Rospond 2003:197):

- (7) komiczny aktor
comic actor
'comical actor (an actor that happens to be funny)'
- (8) aktor komiczny
actor comic
'comedy actor (a type of actor)'

Note that the construction in question is fully productive and regular: as shown below, it is not limited to any particular register (the asterisks below do not mean that the starred examples are ungrammatical as such, but rather that they cannot be used in the classifying way):

- (9a) lody czekoladowe
ice-cream chocolate-ADJ
'chocolate ice-cream'
- (9b) *czekoladowe lody
chocolate-ADJ ice-cream
- (10a) silnik odrzutowy
engine jet-ADJ
'jet engine'

- (10b) *odrzutowy silnik
jet-ADJ engine
- (11a) komputer osobisty
computer personal
'personal computer'
- (11b) *osobisty komputer
personal computer
- (12a) banknot pięciodolarowy
banknote five-dollar-ADJ
'a five-dollar banknote'
- (12b) *pięciodolarowy banknot
five-dollar-ADJ banknote

In many languages the semantic distinction illustrated in (7-8) is not reflected syntactically: for instance, in Spanish examples such as (13) are ambiguous (after Bosque and Picallo 1996).

- (13) actor cómico
actor comic
'comical/comedy actor'

It should be noted that Old Polish, as opposed to Modern Polish, was among such languages (i.e. it had no syntactic means of distinguishing classifying structures from qualifying ones).

4. Postmodification as a Result of Elite-governed Language Change

On the basis of Brajerski's 1963 observations, I assume that the postnominal location of adjectival modifiers, originally copied from Latin, became part of Polish grammar in the second half of the fifteenth century. Interestingly, Brajerski 1963 points out that this syntactic innovation was probably perceived as foreign/marked – possibly formal, rather than colloquial. He also notes that when examples such as (3) appeared in spoken Old Polish (which is, to a certain extent, recorded in the court testimonies that he examined), they were more or less equivalent to clarification expressions of the following type: 'a grove, that is to say my grove'. This means that the postmodification pattern was primarily used when the speaker wanted to be more exact: it introduced additional comment, made the referent definite.

The above semantic interpretation finds support in the fact that the postnominal placement of modifiers triggered another syntactic innovation in Old Polish. Brajerski 1963 shows that several court testimonies written in the second half of the fifteenth century include examples of Prepositional Phrases in which the preposition appears

before both the head noun and the postnominal modifier. This phenomenon of preposition doubling is illustrated in (14):

- (14) w gaju w mojem
 in grove-LOC in my-LOC
 ‘in my grove’

Examples such as (14) indicate that the postnominal modifier was in a way “misplaced” or “detached” from the head noun: it had an adjunctive syntactic character. Therefore, I propose to analyze it as an appositive element. Since the structure illustrated in (3) involved apposition, it was perceived as syntactically complex. Therefore, it gave rise to another unusually complex construction, namely the one with preposition doubling.

Due to its Latin origin, the pattern in (3) was associated with prestige and limited to formal communication. In other words, the postposition of adjectival modifiers was marked stylistically: it was used consciously, in order to give an impression of elegance and elevated style. For example, Jan Sandecki-Malecki, one of the most influential publishers and editors of Polish texts in the sixteenth century, criticized the use of proposed adnominal modifiers in Stanisław Murzynowski’s translation of the New Testament (1551) because he considered this word order colloquial and unsuitable for written texts (cf. Rospond 2003:197-198).

I argue that the postnominal placement of adjectives should be analyzed as an example of elite-governed/learnèd syntactic borrowing. Before the fourteenth century, the N-A structure was calqued from Latin as a high-style equivalent of the native A-N structure. At that point, its use was limited to written texts and formal communication. Note that, as mentioned in Section 2, the N-A word order appeared in translations from Latin first. This observation patterns with Blatt’s 1957 generalization that, at the moment of their introduction, learnèd features are always more frequent in translations than in native texts (cited by Pountain 1998). Interestingly, Pountain 1998 points out that not all Romance writers who calqued Latin expressions had a personal knowledge of Latin. Similarly, we could hypothesize that the postnominal placement of adjectives might have diffused in the varieties used by those Poles who did not speak Latin because they simply copied a feature which characterized the language of the elite.

In the fourteenth century, the N-A pattern started to evolve and became more and more common in spoken Old Polish. However, its semantics changed: it was no longer a prestige equivalent of the regular attributive A-N pattern. Instead, it became an appositive clarifying construction. It seems plausible that this structure was often used in order to clarify what *kind* of entity the speaker had in mind (e.g. ‘an actor, namely a comedy actor’). Therefore, it is not surprising that it was later associated with the notion of classification. The semantic shift that has taken place since the Old Polish period is illustrated in (15).

(15) modification → clarification → classification

The above shift was accompanied by a kind of syntactic reanalysis, as a result of which the appositive (biphrasal) clarifying construction has been reanalyzed as a regular monophrasal nominal structure. It should be noted that the phenomenon of preposition repetition, as described above, is not grammatical in Modern Polish:

(16a) o aktorze komicznym

about actor comic

‘about a comedy actor’

(16b) *o aktorze o komicznym

about actor about comic

The above data suggests that, in Modern Polish, postnominal modifiers are no longer perceived as appositive. They have been reanalyzed as belonging to the main nominal construction.

As mentioned in Section 1, Pountain 1998 argues that a learned feature may lose its “elite” marking, if it is “useful” (fills a gap in the grammar of the borrowing language) and salient (structurally different from other constructions in the borrowing language). In other words, only those learned features which do not have equivalents in the host language are likely to percolate to the non-elite varieties of that language. It should be noted that in most cases the learned status of a linguistic borrowing derives precisely from the fact that the borrowed construction in question does not have a native equivalent. Only in such a situation can one perceive a difference between the prestigious form and its non-prestigious counterpart. This is why learned/elite-governed loans are not normally expected to be “useful” (in Pountain’s 1998 terms) from the point of view of the non-elite subset of the speech community.

However, in the light of Pountain’s 1998 observations, the fact that the postnominal placement of adjectives has become part of the general grammar of Polish is not surprising. Firstly, it was only thanks to the emergence of the N+A construction that Polish gained a means of distinguishing classifying structures from qualifying ones. Thus, the possibility of putting adjectival modifiers after the head noun by all means deserves to be considered “useful”. Secondly, the N+A pattern is definitely very salient in Polish, a language in which all kinds of modifiers are typically placed prenominaly.

According to Bower 2006, one of the most important indicators that help to identify a syntactic calque is that such structures are often “exotic” (exceptional, peripheral, unusual) from the point of view of the host language. Interestingly, Bower 2006 illustrates her understanding of this property with the example of English postnominal adjectival modifiers. Consider the following expressions (Bower 2006 calls such structures compounds; however, I do not adopt this terminology here because I want to

remain neutral with respect to the internal structure of the N-A sequences in English and leave this issue for further research):

(17) governor general

(18) major general

(19) procurator fiscal

The postnominal placement of adjectives in (17-19) results from the fact that these expressions have been borrowed from French (i.e. a language in which adjectives normally appear in postposition). This instance of syntactic calquing is exactly parallel to what happened in the history of postnominal adjectives in Polish. In both cases the borrowed N-A pattern is certainly salient. However, in English it is not “useful” – the postposition of adjectives is not associated with a specific semantic reading. Therefore, the N-A configuration is not productive in English.

It should be emphasized that, although Latin had impact on many Slavic languages, it was only in Polish that the postmodification pattern gave rise to a fully grammaticalized structure associated with a specific semantic function. The postnominal classifying construction is not restricted to any particular variety of Polish. Note that in Czech (whose nominal syntax is otherwise very similar to Polish), the N-A word order is clearly marked pragmatically: it occurs in scientific or high-style poetic texts only – see Veselovská 1995. This means that, in Czech, the original Latin structure remains alien: the postnominal pattern which appears in scientific terminology can best be described as “fossilized”. It has not been reanalyzed syntactically, neither has it been associated with a specific semantic feature. Therefore, there is no reason for the N-A pattern to co-exist with the regular A-N word order.

Calquing is often considered an “artificial” process and, therefore, it is not usually discussed by linguists interested in syntactic change and language contact (as Bowerman 2006 puts it, the phenomenon of calquing is treated as “noise in the data”). Van Marle 2003 and Pountain 1998 argue against the traditional claim that elite-governed/learned influences are immaterial from the point of view of the study of the “natural” evolution of language. As mentioned in Section 1, traditional approaches to linguistic borrowing imply that no contact-induced syntactic change is possible unless it accompanies a change in the lexicon (see van Marle’s 2003 discussion of Thomason and Kaufman 1988; a similar view is presented in a generative analysis of diachronic change proposed by Longobardi 2001). As shown in this paper, the emergence of postnominal modifiers in Polish is an example of a syntactic innovation that was not driven by any changes in the lexicon.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to analyze the diachronic development of postnominal adjectival modifiers in Polish. Based on certain assumptions made by van Marle 2003

and Pountain 1998, I have argued that the emergence of the N-A syntactic construction in Old Polish was an elite-governed/learnèd structural borrowing (calquing) from Latin, which started to percolate to non-elite varieties of Old Polish around the second half of the fifteenth century. I propose that this process of elite-to-non-elite shift was possible thanks to a semantic and syntactic reanalysis that the N-A had undergone.

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