

# Determinatives Again: A Response to Lenchuk and Ahmed

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*In their reply to Reynolds (2013), Lenchuk and Ahmed deny that determinatives can participate in the partitive construction as described and claim that the set of independent possessive pronouns (e.g., my, your, its, etc.) are actually determinatives. Their arguments hinge on a very peculiar understanding of the word can and a failure to recognize that words in different categories may share a shape; they do not succeed. Nevertheless, I agree with Lenchuk and Ahmed that a consistent distinction between function and category should be maintained. ESL grammars don't do this, and they should.*

*Dans leur critique de Reynolds (2013), Lenchuk et Ahmed nient que les déterminants puissent participer à la construction partitive telle que décrite, et affirment que l'ensemble de pronoms possessifs indépendants (par ex. my, your, its, etc.) sont en réalité des déterminants. Leurs arguments reposent sur une interprétation bien particulière du mot can ainsi que sur un manque de reconnaissance que les mots de différentes catégories puissent partager une même forme; leurs arguments ne sont pas convaincants. Toutefois, je suis d'accord avec Lenchuk et Ahmed qu'il faudrait maintenir une distinction cohérente entre la fonction et la catégorie. Les grammaires en ALS ne le font pas, et elles devraient le faire.*

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The main point of Reynolds (2013) is that a consistent distinction between the category of a word (or any syntactic constituent) and its function provides the flexibility needed to maintain a consistent system of description and that ESL grammars commonly confuse category and function, leading to descriptive inconsistency. In the conclusion to their response, Lenchuk and Ahmed (2014) state clearly that they support this position. They disagree, however, with a number of particulars related to the description of determinatives. They further point out that references to Huddleston and Pullum's grammar (2002; hereafter *CGEL*) are lacking page numbers and imply that not all the ideas were fully attributed to *CGEL*.

I fully agree that *CGEL* is a very long book and that page numbers for all citations would be helpful. The manuscripts I submitted and the proofs I approved all included these page numbers, but for some reason they were removed before publication. As for full attribution, the syntactic framework in Reynolds (2013) is necessarily simplified from that in *CGEL* for the audience and format, but it was always my intention to make clear that it is essentially due to *CGEL*. If that wasn't sufficiently explicit, then I thank Lenchuk and Ahmed for providing me the opportunity to clarify.

Turning to the syntactic points that Lenchuk and Ahmed bring up, they first attack the claim that determinatives can participate in the partitive construction as defined in Reynolds (2013). It seems that they take this claim to mean that determinatives must be able to participate in any partitive with any head noun. This is analogous to interpreting the claim that keys open locks to mean that any key is able to open any lock. This, I would submit, is not a normal way to interpret *can*. The fact that *\*many of the sugar* is ungrammatical doesn't negate the fact that *many* can indeed participate in partitives and that this distinguishes it from members of other categories such as adjective, which cannot (e.g., *\*happy of the person/people/humanity*).

The other issue relates to the group dubbed "the *my* set." While these do, as Lenchuk and Ahmed claim, meet two criteria for being determinatives, there is good reason beyond that to believe that they are nouns. This brings up an important issue. It is clear that the Aristotelian idea of categories being defined by necessary and sufficient characteristics is unworkable (e.g., Lakoff, 1987). This is not a problem limited to lexical categories. It applies broadly to categories in any field you care to name. It is an issue that philosophers of science struggle with (e.g., Lakatos, 1978), and I don't claim to have a solution. I concede that it is almost certain that an algorithm using only the rules in Reynolds (2013) could not be written to accurately identify all determinatives and only determinatives. I rely on our community's sharing enough language and experience with me to interpret what I say in a reasonable way. All grammars do this more or less; indeed, all scientists do (Shapin & Schaffer, 1985).

In this particular case, I assert that it is unreasonable to interpret *we/us* and *you* as determinatives in the case of *She would object to ~ taking it* as Lenchuk and Ahmed do. None of the prototypical determinatives work in constructions like this and all of the undisputed pronouns do, as do NPs headed by common nouns (e.g., *She would object to her son taking it*.) Nor am I aware of any grammar that would make a distinction between *She would object to you taking it* (determinative) and *She would object to me taking it* (pronoun). This simply isn't an issue. The confusion here appears to stem from the determinative *you* and the pronoun *you* sharing a shape, just as the noun *try* and the verb *try* do. To claim that there is a pronoun and a determinative that share a shape is entirely different from claiming that determinatives are a distinct category and yet also a subset of pronouns, as some of the grammars I criticize do. The first claim is unremarkable, and the second patently inconsistent. And so, this challenge also fails.

All in all, then, I feel that the evidentiary case for determinatives set out in Reynolds (2013; which is largely due to *CGEL*) stands. But more importantly, Lenchuk and Ahmed affirm the main point: a consistent distinction between function and category should be maintained. ESL grammars don't do this, and they should.

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