

Phraseologie *pur* – The construction $X_{[\text{noun}]}$ *pur* as a productive and in no way ungrammatical schematic idiom

Subject of investigation, objective and approach

Lately, both linguistically interested laypersons as well as trained linguists have been noticing the increased use of a slightly uncommon structure during their daily perusal of the news: the postposing of the uninflected attributive adjective *pur* as in the example *Panik pur*, *Freude pur* or *Entspannung pur*. There are, however, numerous critics, in particular on various websites, that accuse the structure of being ungrammatical. The general tenor is that attributive adjectives must be inflected and prefix their reference word. This article applies a linguistically sound perspective to counter this opinion. It will be shown that the postposed *pur* is not an ungrammatical construction but instead a highly productive schematic idiom. In addition it will be highlighted that the postnominal position of attributive adjectives is in no way an uncommon phenomenon in German. The application of postposed attributive adjectives will be discussed from a language-historical perspective while presenting further constructions and contexts in which postposed adjectives still exist today. Ultimately the main focus of the article is on the description of the schematic idiom $X_{[\text{noun}]}$ *pur* with regard to its structural-formal semantic and pragmatic characteristics. To this end, the methodological approach is based on corpus analyses of the *Deutsches Referenzkorpus* and the *Datenbank für Gesprochenes Deutsch* while the theoretical approach relies on concepts of construction grammar.

Language-historical perspective

A glance at past linguistic eras of German already demonstrates that postposing attributive adjectives was certainly once a standard alternative to prefixed adjectives. Postnominal positioning was a valid alternative to prefixing, both at the outset of Germanic as well as during the period of Old High German. Prefixing initially established itself in Middle High German and was finally common in Early New High German. Therefore, postpositive attributive adjectives cannot (or no longer) be considered the norm but should instead be seen as a (former) realisation common with the German language.

Postpositive attributive adjectives in contemporary German

In addition, and in contrast to critical opinions, postnominal attributive adjectives absolutely constitute a common component of modern language use. Research refers to an entire range of constructions and contexts in which the postposition is still common today and partly even occurs in the unmarked variant. These areas can be divided into “poetical language” (folk songs and literary language) (e.g. *Hänschen klein* and *bei einem Wirte wunder mild* (L. Uhland)) and the domain of “goods, trade, advertising, consumption, media” (e.g. *Spaghetti italienisch*, *Polstergarnitur neu* and *Sport aktuell*). The examples in this article show that postpositive attributive adjectives are neither a marginal phenomenon of contemporary German nor limited to the construction with *pur*.

The schematic idiom $X_{[\text{noun}]} \textit{pur}$

The label of a seemingly ungrammatical construction that critics attach to constructions with postposed *pur* can be relativized with regard to the fact that, from a linguistic perspective, they represent schematic idioms and therefore fixed word combinations/phrasemes. The construction can be classed as formulaic or phraseological.

From a structural perspective, the schematic idiom comprises the uninflected postnominal attributive adjective *pur* and the slot for a noun complement (in almost all cases without an article), which results in the following structural formula $X_{[\text{noun}]} \textit{pur}$. In terms of syntax, the construction frequently coalesces with a copula verb (generally *sein*) and is used as a predicative. It is also not uncommon for the construction to co-occur with the verb *herrschen*. In the case of some nouns, corpus analyses show that the postpositive adjective, in comparison to prepositive adjectives, can even be considered the unmarked case. For example, there are hardly any instances of *pure Stimmung* or *pure Entspannung* while there are numerous cases of *Stimmung pur* and *Entspannung pur*.

The meaning of the adjective *pur* in this construction can be considered ‘unadulterated, clear, thorough’. From a denotative perspective, there is no apparent semantic difference in meaning between post- and prepositive variants (e.g. *Romantik pur* vs *pure Romantik*). However, there is a connotative/associative difference. Postnominal use leads to a stronger intensification compared to the prenominal use; in colloquial language, postnominal positioning is used as a stylistic device to emphasize the expression. Essentially, postposing represents an absolutisation that cannot to the same extent be achieved through (e.g. *Spannung* < *pure Spannung* < *Spannung pur*). In other words: In contrast to prefixing, postposing has added semantic-pragmatic value that is generally characteristic of referential phrasemes.

From a pragmatic perspective, it can be observed that the phraseme can be used to convey a speaker’s critical appraisal. Furthermore, the evaluation of the situation can be either positive or negative depending on the situation. The evaluative intention is increased by embedding the phraseme in a copula construction, in which a pronoun refers to the situation that is to be assessed or criticised (in most cases *Das ist $X_{[\text{noun}]} \textit{pur}$*). Additionally, the corpus analyses verify that the construction is no longer limited to written contemporary language but can also increasingly be found in conceptual orality.

Further schematic idioms with postpositive attributive adjectives

Aside from the construction $X_{[\text{noun}]} \textit{pur}$, German also uses the two schematic idioms $X_{[\text{noun}]} \textit{satt}$ and $X_{[\text{noun}]} \textit{brutal}$ which also feature postpositive attributive adjectives. While these constructions are less frequent in the *Deutsches Referenzkorpus*, they are nonetheless discussed in this article as they are further proof of the fact that postpositive attributive adjectives still exist as productive construction types.

The schematic idiom from the perspective of construction grammar

The alleged ungrammatical character of the schematic idioms $X_{[\text{noun}]} \textit{pur}$ cannot be substantiated from a construction grammar perspective either. Given the fact that, according to construction grammar, our language system consists of conventionalised form-meaning pairs, the construction’s postposed and uninflected *pur* is just as much a component of German as are the entirely ‘unmarked’ constructions. Thanks to construction grammar, it

can be stated that the frequently criticised ungrammatical character of the postpositive *pur* must be relativized as it is generally possible to award it the status of a (fixed) form-meaning pair in the shape of a schematic idioms. As a consequence of the fact that, our language consists entirely of form-meaning pairs at different levels of abstraction, this distinction between a core grammar and an idiosyncratic periphery already loses its *raison d'être*.

Summary and perspective

For one thing, the phenomena discussed in this article highlight the advantages of a stronger connection between phraseology and construction grammar as neither the field of phraseology nor the field of construction grammar have described the analysed phenomenon in detail. For another thing, this article advocates an intensified link between phraseology and language criticism: It would be beneficial to increasingly reflect about (amateur) language-critical observations of certain manifestations in contemporary language from a phraseological perspective. It is often the case that the criticised phenomena turn out to be preformed or formulaic expressions and that their seemingly 'irregular' or ungrammatical character can be relativized with the help of phraseological approaches.