

Expression of possession: structural factors



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The project and the database

- ❑ Project 'Germanic possessive -s: an empirical, historical and theoretical study' funded by the *Arts and Humanities Research Council*
- ❑ Database of possessive noun phrases from the spoken part of the British National Corpus
- ❑ Possessor and Possessum tagged for a number of semantic, syntactic and phonological properties
- ❑ <http://www.llc.manchester.ac.uk/research/projects/germanic-possessive-s/>

Spoken BNC

total tokens (\approx words)	10,409,858
<i>of</i> -possessive	31,677
poss-s total	11,460
poss-s not double or classifier	9,887
double genitive (<i>a friend of John's</i>)	220
classifier genitive (<i>men's magazines</i>)	1,353

The expression of possession

- “expression of possession” in its broadest sense
 - 's possessive
Obama's government
 - of possessive
the government of Obama
 - compound possessive
the Obama government
 - double possessive
a government of Obama's

The expression of possession

- the nature of 's
- the choice between 's and *of*
 - Information structural factors
 - Semantic factors
 - Morphological factors
 - Phonological factors
 - Structural factors

Zwicky (1987), Rosenbach (2002, 2005), Hinrichs & Szmrecsanyi (2007), Altenberg (1982)

Multivariate analysis

- Logistic regression, Goldvarb 3
- Mutual dependence of factor groups not properly controlled for yet, analysis not complete
- Difficulties with topicality and definiteness (cf. Szmrecsanyi & Hinrichs 2007)
- Some trends clear already
- Factor weights, all significant, are given such that
 - those nearer zero favour poss-s
 - those around 0.5 have little effect on choice
 - those nearer 1 favour *of*-possessive
- Thanks to Maciej Baranowski

's / of and animacy

factor	weight
human	0.055
...	...
place	0.343
body part	0.816
inanimate abstract	0.935

- Non-collective human referent is strongest factor in this group predisposing to poss-s

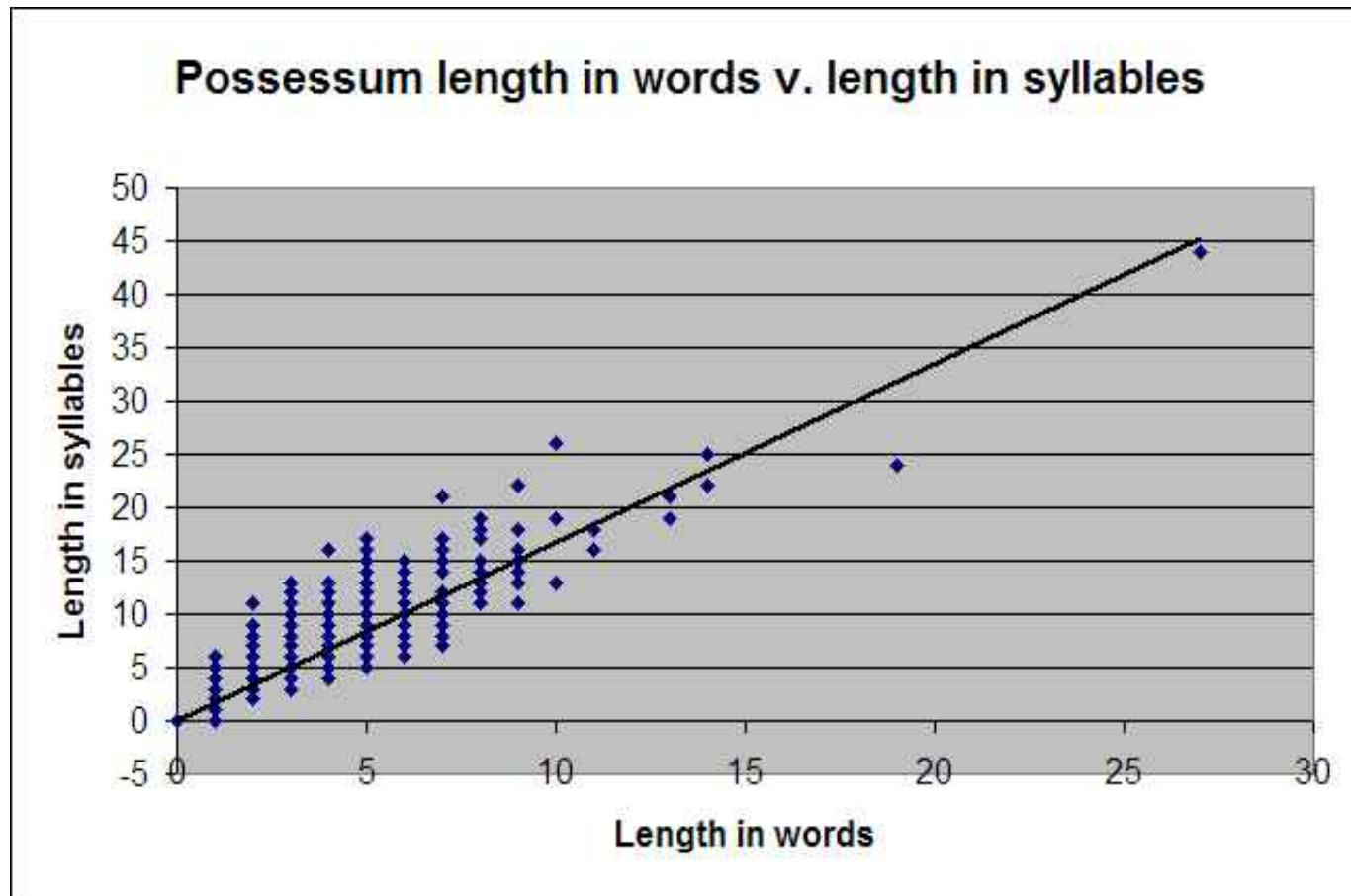
's / of and possessor final sound

factor	weight
other	0.448
unvoiced sibilant, etc. [s, ks, ʃ, tʃ]	0.664
voiced sibilant [z, ʒ, ʒ]	0.655

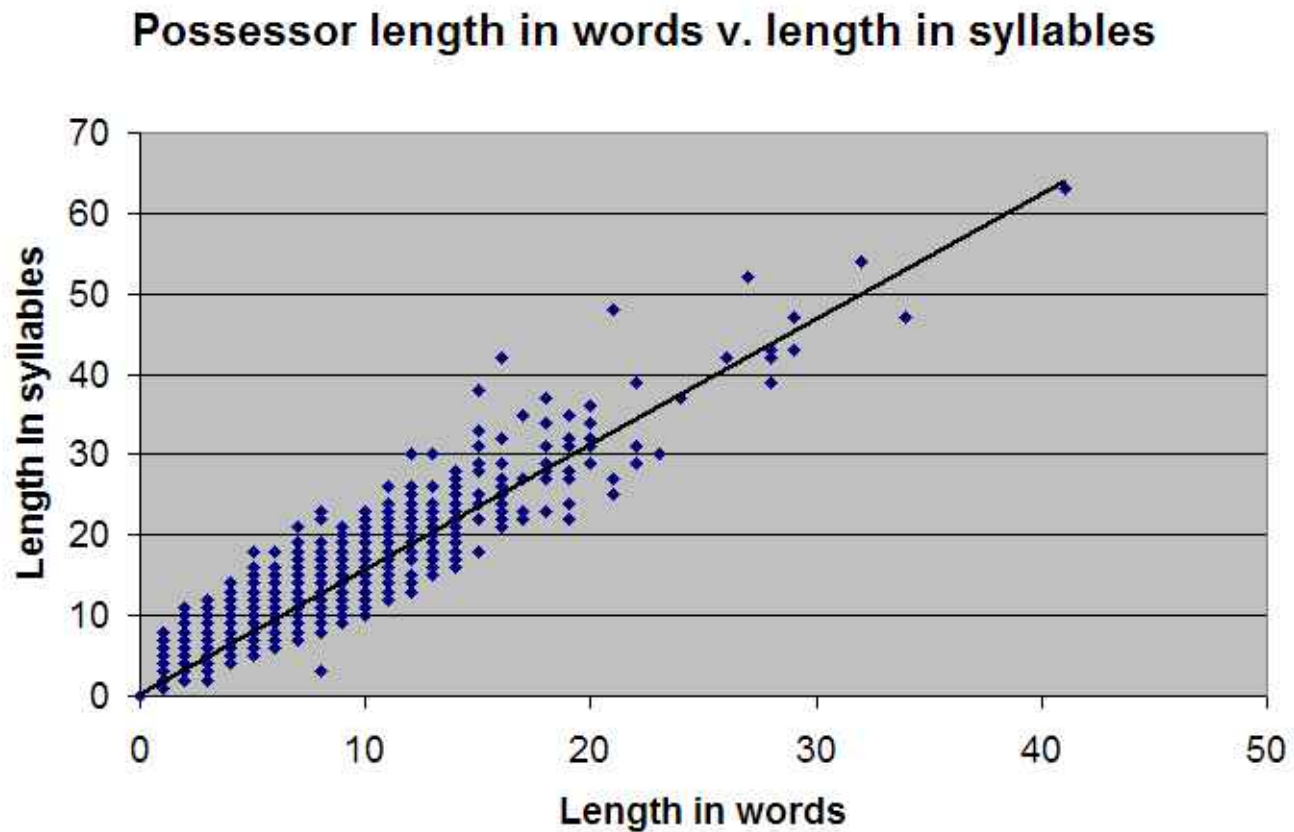
's/of and structural properties

- starting point is weight
- possessum vs possessor
- premodification vs postmodification

Weight: words vs syllables

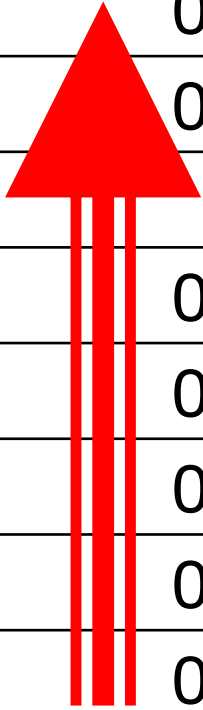


Weight: words vs syllables



possessum length

factor	weight
10 or more	0.006
9	0.084
...	...
6	0.124
5	0.188
4	0.375
3	0.571
2	0.751
1	0.081



possessum length

- The shorter the possessum, the more likely the phrase is to be expressed with *of* (bar one word)
- In *of* possessive
 POSSESSUM < POSSESSOR
- Two options
 - Light phrase first: end weight
 - Light phrase more likely to be old information:
 old < new

possessum length

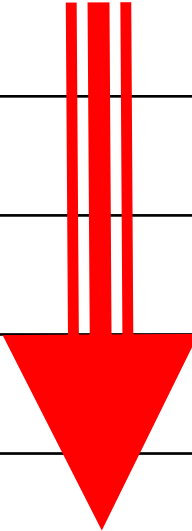
factor	weight
10 or more	0.006
9	0.084
...	...
6	0.124
5	0.188
4	0.375
3	0.571
2	0.751
1	0.081

possessum length: one word

- Unless one-word possessum is non-count or plural, it cannot occur in an *of* possessive
 - *manufacturers of corsets*
 - *staff of the college*but
 - **duty of every woman* (cf *every woman's duty*)
- *of* possessives with two word possessums: 95% consist of determiner and noun

possessor length

factor	weight
1	0.287
2	0.467
3	0.631
4	0.690
5 or more	0.892



possessor length

- The longer the possessor, the more likely to have *of* possessive
- In *of* possessive
 POSSESSUM < POSSESSOR
- Two options
 - Heavy phrase last: end weight
 - Heavy phrase more likely to be new information: old < new

possessor topicality

- Can weight and newness be teased apart?
- Definiteness as short cut to topicality

	Poss-s		of		
	N	%	N	%	total
def	7540	26.0	21423	74.0	28963
indef	1837	15.2	10244	84.8	12081
total	9377	22.8	31667	77.2	

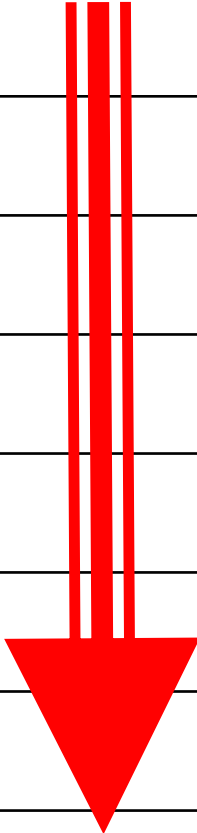
possessor topicality

factor	weight
indefinite	0.605
definite	0.454

- ❑ Strong effect for end weight
- ❑ Weaker effect for topicality

possessor length: premodification

factor	weight
1	0.425
2	0.647
3	0.721
4	0.859
5	0.870
6	0.969
7	0.932
8 or more	0.911



possessor length: postmodification

- Postmodification is of special relevance for the nature of 's, "group genitive"
- Right edge only vs non-head
- Right edge only: co-ordination
your father and grandfather's attitude

possessor length: postmodification

- Quirk et al. treat measure co-ordinations as “group genitive” (1985: 1345)
- Biber et al. (1999: 298) include both coordination types under “group genitive”
- Booij 2008 takes it as an argument for right-edge marking, hence clitic status
- Payne & Huddleston treat N & N coordination as head genitive, not phrasal genitive (2002: 481-2)

co-ordination

- co-ordination and right edge only vs repeated

	poss-s		of	
	N	%	N	%
once	125	61.0	662	93.6
repeated	80	39.0	45	6.4
total	205	100.0	707	100.0

co-ordination: meaning and form

- joint ownership → single marking
separate ownership → double marking

Norwich City and Swindon's tie

? *Norwich City's and Swindon's tie*

but

South America and Asia's decline

and

men and women's language

women's and men's language

Bill and Hillary's sex life

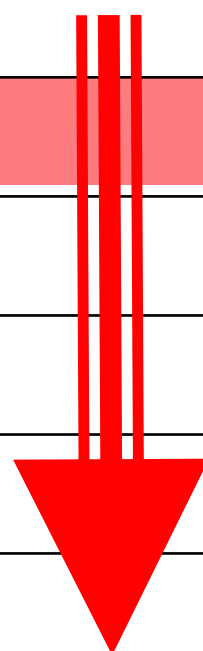
- Slight trend at most

possessor length: postmodification

- ❑ Postmodification: where distinction can be made between right edge and head
- ❑ Right edge clitic → length of postmodification of possessor should not influence choice
- ❑ Right edge clitic → final element of postmodification of possessor should not influence choice

possessor length in: postmodification

factor	weight
0	0.455
1	0.374
2	0.700
3	0.865
4-7	0.987
8 or more	0.972



- Possessors with post-modification strongly disfavours 's *possessive*

possessor postmodification with *poss-s*

postmodifier	number
<i>(some/any/every/no one/body) else</i>	118
<i>of</i> PP	76
<i>in</i> PP	6
<i>with/across/down/as/for/on</i> PP	7
relative clause	6
total	213

possessor postmodification with *poss* 's

- 122 *some/any/every/no one/body else* possessors in total, of which 4 with *of*:
interaction human → 's vs sibilant final → *of*

possessor length in words: postmodification

factor	weight
0	0.455
1	0.374
2	0.700
3	0.865
4-7	0.987
8 or more	0.972

- Possessors with post-modification strongly disfavours *'s possessive*

possessor postmodification with *poss-s*

- 122 *some/any/every/no one/body else*
- *of* PPs are complements, many of them of the type *the Bishop of Liverpool, the Duke of Cornwall, the Secretary of State*
- expressions like *cat in hell's*
- name *the world-wide Fun[d] for Nature's*
- other PPs, not complements and not collocations
- relative clauses

→ **so a well-behaved clitic ?**

possessor postmodification with *poss 's*

BUT other PPs with *in*:

- ❑ *It doesn't affect the value of anybody's vote in those countries*
- ❑ *instead of borrowing other people's in the yard*
- ❑ *someone's baby in the audience that we're, we're having a go at*
- ❑ *When it is someone's birthday in the family*
- ❑ *It was somebody else's fault in a different organisation*

possessor postmodification with *poss 's*

BUT other PPs:

- ❑ *my neighbour's husband down the stair*
- ❑ *We don't know the gentleman's name with the tape recorder*
- ❑ *is it Clarke Kent, is that the guys name on television*
- ❑ *a bit of a twinkle in somebody's eye with no money at all to spend on physical work*
- ❑ *It's the neighbour's house across the road*
- ❑ *I was very friendly with the manager's secretary of the Co-op, Cyril*

possessor postmodification with *poss 's*

BUT relative clauses:

- ❑ *you must put something in a person's mouth that has epilepsy*
- ❑ *and I went to my son's which is now coming*
- ❑ *what I'm entitled to is obviously my week's wage that I've worked*

possessor postmodification with *poss 's*

BUT relative clauses:

- ❑ *has allayed people's fears who've been used for those residential home agreements*
- ❑ *he gives me a bit of paper with the horses names wants galloping*
- ❑ *until they landed on somebody's desk who was actually supposed to carry out the work*

possessor postmodification with *poss* 's

“Split genitives” as errors

- Quite a consistent pattern
- “Group genitive” not always available
 - anybody in those countries' vote*
 - ?my week that I've worked's wages*
 - ?somebody with no money at all to spend on physical work's eye*
- Historical construction?

possessor postmodification with *poss* 's

We also get “double genitives”

- *somebody's else's name*
- *someone's else's name*
- *somebody's else's rape*
- *everybody's else's time*

possessor postmodification: Swedish

Swedish possessive s	with postmodification
2588	2

den vanlige mannen på gatans liv
the ordinary man.DEF on street.DEF.S life
'the life of the man in the street'

dom anställdas synpunkt som ska jobba
the employed view who shall work

med djuren

with animal.DEF.S

'the view of the employees who are going to work
with the animals'

possessor postmodification: Swedish

fotbollsupportrarnas *skrik* *som* *just*

football.supporterpl.DEF.S shouts rel just

sett *sitt* *lag* *förlora*

see.ppart poss.refl team lose.inf

med *tre* *mål*

with three goals

'the shouts of the football supporters who had just
seen their team lose by three goals'

possessor postmodification: Swedish

Den där cykeln är flickans från Motala.
that bicycle.DEF is girl.def.s from Motala

'That bicycle belongs to the girl from Motala.'

Telefonen, skrivbordet och faxen är
telephone.def desk.def and fax.def is

flickvärens som han bor hos i Bryssel
girl.friend.def.srel he live.finat in Brussels

'The telephone, the desk and the fax belong to the girlfriend with whom he is staying in Brussels.'

Conclusions

- Added to evidence for conditioning factors such as animacy, sibilant-final, weight etc, using large balanced database of spoken language;
- More work to be done on English co-ordination, length and mutual dependency of factors;

Conclusions

- Evidence from possessors with postmodification shows unexpected usage given a right edge analysis, tension between head and edge;
- Influence of category of final word in postmodification;
- More work on Swedish.

Other work connected to project

- Analysis of database of Swedish possessives;
- Comparative historical survey of expression of possession in Germanic;
- Analysis of Faroese noun phrases in general and definiteness and possession in particular (Pauline Harries).