What's wrong with possessive 's?

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Structure of talk

- 1. Views of the English possessive
- 2. Our data
- 3. Kinds of poss-s
- 4. Evidence for nature of poss-s
- 5. Choice between poss-s and *of*-possessive

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Poss-s

- Genitive and possessive each problematic as labels.
- We prefer the term possessive 's for the 's morph, abbreviated poss-s.

Theoretical status of poss-s

- English poss-s commonly described as a clitic, often the standard example
 - Clitic: element which does not have the independence of a word (prosodically) but which is positioned by the same rules as independent words, i.e. by syntactic rules
- Another theoretical tradition takes poss-s to be a phrasal affix
 - Internal structure of host word and host phrase should be invisible to clitic, and they aren't

Descriptive grammars

Theoretical accounts agree that poss-s can be freely added (only) at the right edge of an NP

Descriptive accounts recognise that things are not quite so neat

- Quirk et al. (1985)
- Biber et al. (1999)
- Huddleston/Pullum (2002)

Biber et al. (1999)

Genitive is a 'case inflection for nouns'

- Most nouns rarely occur in the genitive'
- □ `[s]-genitives are outnumbered by ofphrases in all registers'
- 'The group genitive is chiefly used with more or less fixed collocations. When there is post-modification, the more common alternative is to resort to an ofphrase rather than an s-genitive'

Payne & Huddleston (2002)

- Pronouns treated as subtype of noun; possessive D (e.g. *my*, *mine*) = genitive case of pronoun (e.g. /)
- Two kinds of poss-s:
 - head genitive has poss-s on head noun ■ phrasal genitive ≈ group genitive
- Phrasal genitive 'is normally restricted to post-head dependents with the form of a PP, including *else*' [!] (2002: 479)

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So-called "group genitives"

- This is critical pattern for all analysts
- Poss-s attached at right edge of possessor NP to element that is not head
- Should be as acceptable as attachment to head noun
- Said to be spoken/colloquial (Carstairs) 1987, Rosenbach 2005)
- We have started with spoken component of BNC, and ...

Spoken BNC total tokens (≈ words) 10,409,858 31,640 of-possessive poss-s total 11,419 poss-s not double or 9,813 classifier double genitive (a friend of John's) classifier genitive 1,386 (men's magazines)

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Added to stem in one-word NP

Jackie's talk One of life's little comforts

- Most straightforward use of poss-s
- Poss-s added like an inflection to a noun or even, perhaps, <u>as</u> an inflection

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(All examples from spoken BNC)

Added to irregular plural

children's needs the mice's nest young people's money

Coincides with regular plural

If I could draw members attention to the supplementary papers And don't forget <pause> erm perhaps we ought to say a word on the er on the conservative's side here.

 Is one occurrence of -s `suppressed'?
 (Classification ignores missing or misplaced apostrophes in transcription)

No extra syllable after sibilant

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when I was in Hans' class

- Not an example of poss-s if suppressed or otherwise absent
- ??Arguably could be analysed as poss-s somehow merged with final sound of stem, cf. portmanteau analysis of regular plural possessives

Added to head-final NP

the oldest girl's name

- Usually treated as addition to stem, just like simplest *Jackie's talk* pattern
- In Old English, genitive would have been marked on all or most words in NP
- In PDE poss-s has semantic scope over the whole NP:

[the oldest girl]'s name

<section-header>Added to pronoun + elsei's not right up against somebody
else's house• Assumption is that somebody is head of
possessor NP• else is post-head dependent

Added to N & N coordination

- If you happen to know your bride or bridegroom's tastes
- What was your father and grandfather's attitude to authority in the pit?
- Poss-s fully acceptable after this routine kind of coordination
- Remains grammatical if either 1st or 2nd conjunct plus conjunction omitted:

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- your father's attitude
- your grandfather's attitude

Added to N & N coordination

- Poss-s again has semantic scope over whole coordinated NP: [your [father and grandfather]]'s attitude *your father attitude
- Poss-s applied to whole coordination rather than each conjunct – which also possible
- Choice partially correlated with semantic interpretation, but inconsistently applied by speakers (Biber et al. 1999: 298)

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Added to measure coordination

an hour and half's discussion a year or two's hiatus a day or so's time

- In time/measure phrase, usually adds fractional or approximate value which cannot stand on its own as possessor: *so's time
- Fractional ones ≈ archaic numeral (an hour and [a] half = one and a half hours)
- Approximation coordinations semantically equivalent to postmodification

Coordination possessives

- Quirk et al. treat measure coordinations as group genitive (1985: 1345), though ?silent on N & N type (her mum and dad's house)
- Biber et al. (1999: 298) include both coordination types under group genitive
- Payne & Huddleston treat N & N coordination as head genitive, not phrasal genitive (2002: 481-2)

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Added to non-head-final NP

the presbytery of Hamilton's claim/ overture/etc [×4]

the director of social services report [×2]

the Department of Transports manual of environmental appraisal

[a] cat in hell's chance [×2]

The implications for my daughter's safety and security, and and mine and the rest of my family's Added to non-head-final NP a huge percentage of the whole of Scotland's population contribute to China's, China as a whole's economic development the colour of the leader of the council's shirt he was engaged to, then to the then president of America's daughter the Prime Minister of the time's favourite WDA head i's our land <pause> it's not our land <pause> it's the people of Leicestershire's land

Added to non-head-final NP

the whole of the planet's energy existence the lady of the house's dress the world-wide Fun [sic] for Nature's Walk for the Rain Forest

the Archbishop of Canterbury's special envoy near one of my sister's houses

your letter from the er director of er <unclear> the Officers of the Director General's broadcasting Principle Assistant Dalek to the Director General

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So-called "group genitive"

At most 22 examples (20 certain), just 0.22% of poss-s in spoken BNC

- All have noun immediately before poss-s (cf. received wisdom that any category will do)
- Many have phrasal proper name as possessor
 - the Presbytery of Hamilton (×4, all in one text), the Department of Transport, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the World-Wide Fund for Nature, the Director of Social Services, etc.

and/or well-established collocation

the lady of the house

Additional "group genitives"? Coordinated types are not all the same: (i) mum and dad's house In N&N, final word of NP is really part of head [between 28 and 31 examples] (ii) a(n) hour/week/year and (a) half's discussion/etc. Can be treated as set phrase [×4, all with half] Approximations are most group-like:

(iii) a day or so's time, a year or two's hiatus

Real "group genitive" or set phrase? [×2]

"Group genitive" with else?

- 64 examples of indefinite pronoun + else +poss-s
- But else always comes immediately after head without possibility of movement
- Head in BNC data always indefinite pronoun like *somebody*, *everyone*, etc., items which only permit post-modification, even by Adj

Avoidance strategy: of-possessive We're speaking for working people in this country and we are a reliable indicator of the feelings, the dreams, the hopes of working people right across the country [...]

- No poss-s despite human, topical possessor and lengthy possessum (but also – naturally – lengthy possessor)
- More work to be done on statistics

Avoidance: split possessive

- oh you must put something in a person's mouth that has epilepsy
- until they landed on somebody's desk who was actually supposed to carry out the work

has allayed people's fears who've been used for those residential home agreements

and I went to my son's, er which is now coming

Avoidance: split possessive

- a, a bit of a twinkle in somebody's eye with no money at all to spend on physical work
- We don't know the gentleman's name with the tape recorder

when it's someone's birthday in the family

- it's somebody else's fault in a different organisation
- I was very friendly with the manager's secretary of the Co-op, Cyril [...]

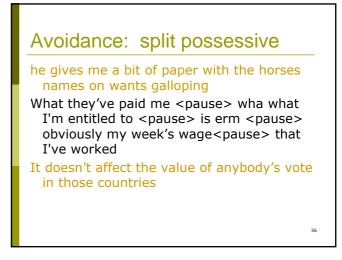
Avoidance: split possessive

yes er no it's the neighbour's house across the road

my neighbour's husband down the stair instead of borrowing other people's in the yard

This is someone's baby in the audience that we're, we're having a go at

is it Clarke Kent, is that the guys name on television



Split possessive

- 16 or 17 examples, comparable with "group genitive"
- Theoretical analyses and descriptive grammars all predict group genitive
- Speaker actually produces split possessive with poss-s attached to head noun and not at right edge
- Not randomly distributed
- Group genitive" not always available

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Headedness of possessor

ordinary poss-s	A	≥9,673
split	\wedge	16-17
N & N coordination		28-31
measure coordination with half		4
else		64
proper name or set phrase		14-15
approximation coordination		2
real group		6-7

Attachment tendencies of poss-s

- Strongly prefers to attach to
 - Head of NP
 - Noun
- In practice, these tendencies rarely allowed to be overridden, and even then
 NP is often (partly) lexicalised
- Distinction between headed and phrasal
- poss-s not sharply drawn and not needed
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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

possessor animacy

factor	weight
human	0.177
place	0.675
body part	0.932
inanimate concrete	0.954

Non-collective human referent is strongest factor in this group predisposing to poss-s 42

possessor length in words

factor	weight
1	0.306
2	0.470
3	0.627
4	0.657
5 or more	0.869

possessor post-modification

factor	weight
no	0.473
yes	0.829

Post-modification strongly disfavours poss-s

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possessor final sound

factor	weight
other	0.445
unvoiced sibilant, etc. [s, ks, f, tf]	0.666
voiced sibilant [z, 3, &]	0.670

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possessum animacy

factor	weight
no possessum	0.173
inanimate concrete	0.260
collective human	0.308
time	0.768
human	0.779
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possessum length in words

factor	weight
10 or more	0.007
9	0.080
6	0.122
5	0.191
4	0.365
3	0.564
2	0.743
1	0.088

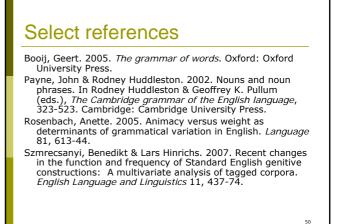
Acknowledgement

 We are grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for financial support 2006-9 for the project 'Germanic possessive -s : an empirical, historical and theoretical study'.
 Project website http://www.llc.manchester.ac.uk/resear ch/projects/germanic-possessive-s/

Our 's project continues ...

This presentation will be available – comments welcome – on project web page and also on

http://tinyurl.com/DD-UMan



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