

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS  
IN THE GERMANIC LANGUAGES\*

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**Abstract**

Proto-Germanic had a full case system within which the genitive was used to express possession in its broadest sense. In the modern Germanic languages, there are a number of different ways of expressing possession; the genitive case is still used, as is an element which developed from the genitive case, but there are also more recently developed constructions. In this paper, we compare the expressions of possession available to a number of Germanic languages and consider what the modern systems can tell us about language change and why similar systems develop in very different ways.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Proto-Germanic, possession was expressed by means of the genitive case, which was part of a full case system. In the present-day Germanic languages there is a range of constructions available to express possession, including the genitive case. The individual languages use these constructions to varying degrees and in divergent ways; not every possessive construction is present in every language, and it is rare that a particular construction is used in precisely the same way in two languages. Nonetheless, the family resemblance of the constructions used in the expression of possession in the Germanic languages is clear. In this paper, we trace the development

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of expressions of possession in Afrikaans, Danish, Dutch, English, Faroese, German, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish and describe how the distinct present day systems developed from the common case system of the ancestor language. The paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the similarities and difference between the modern systems and the historical processes which led to the current distribution. We will only consider noun phrase internal expressions of possession so that we will not for instance discuss predicative possession. The depth and breadth of information available on the different languages varies, particularly as regards historical data, and this will be reflected in this paper.

Dialects of Germanic languages reveal a far greater variation than the standard varieties, but any detailed description of the data is beyond the scope of this paper. One type of possessive construction not dealt with in the present paper is that which has properties of compounds, such as *the Obama administration* (= *Obama's administration*) or *a Brown policy* (= *a policy of Brown's*) in which the possessor (i.e. *Obama* and *Brown* in these examples) is unmarked and the construction is ungrammatical without an article.

## 2 THE GERMANIC POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

### 2.1 Terminology

There is no established terminology for the different types of constructions we are dealing with in this paper. POSSESSIVE is often used since the core meaning of the construction is to express possession. However, none of the constructions referred to here is reserved for true ownership; they can be extended to other relations, for instance 'creator of', 'ruler of' or 'has as a part' and are also often used more broadly, for instance in partitives and measure phrases. GENITIVE CASE is also often used, partly because early forms of the Germanic languages had a full case system and one of the current exponents of the relation is a development from that earlier genitive case.

We shall generally refer to the construction type as the POSSESSIVE, in the full awareness that its exponents in the different languages are often used to describe

relations other than core possession. We shall recognize four major types of expression of possession in the Germanic languages. The distinctions are based largely on the morpho-syntactic properties of the present day versions, but the historical origin tends to correspond closely to its modern properties. The one exception is the Faroese possessive marker *sa*, to which we will return in section 8.2.2.3.

## 2.2 *Genitive case (GEN)*

We shall use the term GEN(ITIVE CASE) for possessive expressions in which the possessor is marked by a bound element and which forms part of a system within which it contrasts productively with other cases, such as nominative, accusative and dative. Though the canonical use of GEN is for possession (in its broadest sense), in a fully productive system, it tends also to be required on objects of certain verbs, preposition and adjectives. For Dutch, though there is no productive case system, we will still refer to a modestly productively used construction as GEN since it is a remnant of the case system and can be distinguished from the POSS-S construction (see section 2.3).

In this construction type, modifiers and determiners generally show agreement, so that possession is marked more than once. The actual morpheme expressing case will often vary with gender and number. The order between the possessor and the possessum may vary. Typical examples are found in (1) ((1b) is from Lockwood, 1955:104).

- |     |    |                             |                         |                   |        |
|-----|----|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--------|
| (1) | a. | das                         | Haus des                | Mannes            | German |
|     |    | <i>DEF.NT.SG</i>            | <i>house.DEF.GEN.SG</i> | <i>man.GEN.SG</i> |        |
|     |    | ‘the man’s book’            |                         |                   |        |
|     | b. | móttakarans                 | undirskrift             | Faroese           |        |
|     |    | <i>recipient.DEF.GEN</i>    | <i>signature</i>        |                   |        |
|     |    | ‘the recipient’s signature’ |                         |                   |        |

### 2.3 Possessive *s* (POSS-*s*)

The term POSS-*s* will be used for constructions in which possession is marked once only by a bound invariant marker — in all the languages considered here this is *s*. Examples are provided in (2).

(2) a. the man's book

b. mannens bok  
*man.DEF.POSS book*  
'the man's book'

Swedish

This construction is well-studied, particularly as it relates to English, and it has been associated with a number of terms in the literature ('*s*-genitive' (e.g. Rosenbach, 2002, Rosenbach, 2003), '*s*-construction' (Weerman and de Wit, 1999), '*s*-form' (Rosenbach and Vezzosi, 1999), 'Saxon genitive' (much traditional work, but also e.g. de Vries, 2006), 'English genitive' (Bermúdez-Otero & Payne to appear *passim*) and 'prenominal genitive' (Allen, 1997)). The invariant marker developed from one of the markers of GEN in earlier forms of the language and is cognate with genitive markers in other branches of Indo-European, for instance Latin *-is*.

In the POSS-*s* construction, the possessor precedes the possessum. The POSS-*s* marker is usually described as a right edge marker or clitic. For the vast majority of POSS-*s* uses, the head noun is the final element of the possessor noun phrase, so that the POSS-*s* marker is on the word that is both the head noun and the rightmost element (Scott et al., 2007). When the head noun is not the rightmost element, the marker may appear on a non-head element, as in (3). This is most commonly referred to as the 'group genitive' (a term coined by Jespersen, 1894), and more recently the 'phrasal genitive' (Rosenbach, 2002:312) for English. We will refer to such constructions as POSTMOD POSS-*s*.

(3) a. the leader of the council's shirt

b. företaget pappa jobbar på's hemsida<sup>1</sup>  
*company.DEF dad works on.POSS home page*  
'the company my dad works for's home page'

Swedish

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<sup>1</sup> [www.tiger.se/book/guestbook25.html](http://www.tiger.se/book/guestbook25.html) [accessed 18.09.09]

It is the distribution illustrated in (3), generally assumed to be more prevalent in the spoken language (see for instance Carstairs, 1987, Rosenbach, 2005), which has led to the standard assumption that POSS-S is a relatively unproblematic clitic in these languages, but the construction is actually quite unusual, even in spoken corpora (Scott et al., 2007). When the head noun is not the rightmost element, an alternative construction may be used, but there are also alternative distributions of POSS-S. One alternative present in several of the languages considered is illustrated in (4). Here the postmodification of the possessor phrase is extraposed and occurs after the possessum. The POSS-S can then occur on the head noun of the possessor.

- (4) a. the gentleman's name with the tape recorder (BNC: FM7 0008)
- b. Holger Vestergaards telefonnummer fraNy Alliance<sup>2</sup> Danish  
*Holger Vestergaard.POSS telephone number from Ny Alliance*  
 'the phone number of Holger Vestergaard from Ny Alliance'

Such constructions have been referred to as the 'split construction' (Rosenbach, 2002) or 'combined genitive' (Allen, 2003); we will use the term SPLIT POSS(ESSIVE).<sup>3</sup>

The distinction we make between GEN and POSS-S is partly dependent on whether or not the language can be said to have a case system. Establishing when a case system or an individual case is lost is no straightforward matter. In most of the languages, such as the Mainland Scandinavian languages, there was a general decline in the case system, with genitive no longer being part of a system of contrasting cases. Other languages, like Faroese, have preserved a case system but have all but lost the genitive.<sup>4</sup> Focusing on the genitive, there are essentially two changes that create the POSS-S construction;

- (i) the number of different exponents of the case reduces — in the end to one, -s, which spreads from the original masculine and neuter paradigm across all noun classes;
- (ii) the marking no longer involves agreement, so that there is once only marking in a possessor noun phrase.

<sup>2</sup> *De sorte spejdere*, Danmarks Radio P3, 6.2.08

<sup>3</sup> Allen (e.g. 2008: 92-3) uses the term 'split genitive' to refer to a different kind of construction.

<sup>4</sup> As mentioned in section 8.2.2.1, the role of GEN in Faroese is controversial, but it would appear that in naturally occurring data it is quite rare.

Both changes are taken as evidence of a decline of the genitive case and the development of POSS-S. More generally, the genitive also stops occurring on noun phrases where it was required by a verb or a preposition. In the languages we are considering, this tends to be an early change. It would not be sensible to take any one of these as the one piece of evidence that the language no longer has a genitive case. When we refer to the end of the genitive, this is then by necessity a vague description, not until the *s* occurs once only in a complex phrase headed by a feminine noun do we have a clear instance of POSS-S. We will use GEN for constructions that form part of a case system or that can be shown to have developed historically from the genitive and that can be distinguished from a POSS-S form, even when its use is very restricted and the language can no longer be said to have a case system, as in Dutch. We refer to a form as POSS-S when there is just one form and when there is no agreement. As always, there is a period of change when data is conflicting or ambiguous.<sup>5</sup>

#### 2.4 Coreferential pronoun (COREF PRON)

In this construction, the possessor is followed by a coreferential possessive pronoun. Both elements precede the possessum. Where the language has a case system, the possessor usually occurs in an unmarked form or in the dative case (or, in earlier periods of German and some present-day Swiss dialects, in the genitive case). Examples are provided in (5).

- |     |    |                        |            |                   |             |        |
|-----|----|------------------------|------------|-------------------|-------------|--------|
| (5) | a. | de                     | man        | z'n               | boek        | Dutch  |
|     |    | <i>DEF</i>             | <i>man</i> | <i>PRON.3SG.M</i> | <i>book</i> |        |
|     |    | ‘the man’s book’       |            |                   |             |        |
|     | b. | dem                    | Mann       | sein              | Buch        | German |
|     |    | <i>DEF.MASC.SG.DAT</i> | <i>man</i> | <i>PRON.3SG.M</i> | <i>book</i> |        |
|     |    | ‘the man’s book’       |            |                   |             |        |

The pronoun may show agreement with the possessor, compare the examples in (6) with (5).

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<sup>5</sup> In a number of influential works on PDE, POSS-S is described as the genitive case (e.g. Quirk et al 1985, Biber et al 1999, Huddleston & Pullum 2002). We are not wishing to argue with their analyses (argued for in some detail by Payne & Huddleston 2002); our interest is in distinguishing two stages of the development of the construction.

- |     |    |                        |                 |                   |             |        |
|-----|----|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------|--------|
| (6) | a. | de kinderen            | hun             | boeken            | Dutch       |        |
|     |    | <i>the child.PL</i>    | <i>PRON.3PL</i> | <i>book.PL</i>    |             |        |
|     |    | ‘the children’s books’ |                 |                   |             |        |
|     | b. | der                    | Frau            | ihr               | Buch        | German |
|     |    | <i>DEF.FEM.SG.DAT</i>  | <i>woman</i>    | <i>PRON.3SG.F</i> | <i>book</i> |        |
|     |    | ‘the woman’s book’     |                 |                   |             |        |

A superficially similar construction found in earlier periods of English, giving examples such as *bishop Cox his funeral*, has a different origin and is therefore not included here as a type of COREF PRON; instead the term used by Allen (2008), SEPARATED GENITIVE, is used. The arguments for this will be provided in section 7.1.

## 2.5 Preposition (PREP)

All the Germanic languages can also express possession by means of a preposition. In some languages, one preposition is in general use with possession, as in English (7a). Other languages, like Swedish use a number of different prepositions (7b)–(7d). We will return to the distribution of these prepositions in section 8.3.3.

- |     |    |   |            |   |
|-----|----|---|------------|---|
| (7) | a. | the vote of the people  |            |   |
|     | b. | underlag  | till       | polisutredningen (Språkbanken: GP01)          |
|     |    | <i>the basis.DEF</i>  | <i>to</i>  | <i>police.enquiry.DEF</i>                     |
|     |    | ‘the basis of the police investigation’                         |            |   |
|     | c. | namn och telefonnummer  | på         | tre ansvariga tjänstemän (GSLC: V7703011)     |
|     |    | <i>name and telephone number</i>                                | <i>on</i>  | <i>three responsible civil servants</i>       |
|     |    | ‘name and telephone number of three responsible civil servants’ |            |   |
|     | d. | chefen  | för        | amerikanska centralbanken (Språkbanken: GP01) |
|     |    | <i>boss.DEF</i>   | <i>for</i> | <i>American central bank.DEF</i>              |
|     |    | ‘the boss of the Central Bank of America’                       |            |   |

It has to be said that even in languages which can be said to have a single preposition to express possession, there are usually some locational prepositions which can be used as alternatives to specific possessive constructions. Examples from English are provided in (8).

- (8) a. the entrance to the hotel (BNC: KDE 3340)  
 cf the hotel's entrance
- b. the new roof on the Centre Court (BNC: CKL 349)  
 cf the Centre Court's new roof
- c. the northbound exit from Victoria [station] (BNC: AMR 28)  
 cf Victoria station's northbound exit

### 3 PROTO-GERMANIC

Proto-Germanic (PGmc), the common ancestor of all the languages discussed, is assumed to have had six cases, namely nominative, accusative, dative, genitive, vocative and instrumental, although the last two, which were subsumed into the nominative and dative cases respectively, were rare already in the oldest attested stages of Germanic (Robinson, 1992:31, Ringe, 2006:233–4). The genitive case is assumed to have expressed possession and also to have been governed by some verbs and prepositions (Prokosch, 1939:230, Ringe, 2006:234). Already at this early stage, the genitive was used not only for core possession, but also indicated more generally ‘various types and degrees of connectivity between the two nouns [i.e. possessor and possessum]’ (Prokosch, 1939:230). Lehmann (1972:244, 263, 1994:34) and Ramat (1998a:411) assume that PGmc had the unmarked order possessor<possessum as in the example from runic inscriptions in (9).<sup>6</sup> However, this seems to be at least partly on the assumption that the language had OV order and that it would have been consistently head final. The possessor<possessum order could be found in other early varieties of Germanic, as in (10a) and (11a), but the order was clearly flexible, since examples of possessum<possessor order are also easy to find, as in (10b) and (11b). Indeed, though Lehmann (1994:34) describes Gothic as having possessor<possessum order, in the Gothic Bible texts the number of noun phrases with possessum<possessor order, like (10b), far outweigh those with the allegedly unmarked possessor<possessum order, as in (10a). Given the scarcity of evidence from Runic inscriptions and the apparently conflicting data from Gothic and Old

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<sup>6</sup> Ramat (1998b) refers to it as Common Germanic rather than PGmc.



Saxon, we would be reluctant to posit one order as having been the obviously unmarked for PGmc.<sup>7</sup>

(9) a. a(n)sugislas muha (c. 500 AD, Kragehul inscription)  
*Ansugisla.GEN follower*  
 ‘Ansugisla’s follower’

b. hnabudas hlaiwa (c. 500 AD, Bø memorial stone)  
*Hnabud.GEN grave*  
 ‘Hnabuds grav’

(10) a. inuh attins izwaris wijan<sup>8</sup>  
*without father.GEN your will*  
 ‘without your father’s will’  
 (Gothic, Wulfila Bible Matthew 10.29, c. 6<sup>th</sup> c)

b. runos þiudinassaus gudis (Gothic, Wulfila Bible Luke 8.10, c. 6<sup>th</sup> c)  
*mysteries kingdom.GEN God.GEN*  
 ‘the mysteries of God’s kingdom’

(11) a. uualdandes uuilleon (Old Saxon, Heliand c 830, from Lehmann 1972: 263)  
*ruler.GEN will*  
 ‘the Ruler’s will’

b. Tho gihorde that fridubarn godes uuillean thes uuibes  
*then perceived that child God.GEN belief the.GEN*  
*woman.GEN*  
 ‘then that child of God perceived the belief of the woman’  
 (Old Saxon, Heliand c 830, from Lehmann 1972: 263)

The marker of POSS-S in modern Germanic languages can be traced back to one of the genitive singular endings of PGmc. Indeed, already in Proto-Indo-European the genitive singular ending is believed to have been *-s* — with the allomorphs *-es* and *-os* — for at least for certain nouns (Prokosch, 1939:233, Lehmann, 1993: 145).

A change that is assumed to have come about between Proto-Indo-European and PGmc is that the latter had prepositions whereas their existence in PIE is unclear

<sup>7</sup> It should be pointed out that the Greek origin for an example such as (10b) had the possessum<possessor order as in (i), which may have influenced the Gothic translation. However, more evidence would need to be adduced to posit the opposite order as unmarked for Gothic.

(i) τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ  
 the.PLU.ACC mysteries.ACC the.GEN kingdom.GEN the.GEN God.GEN

<sup>8</sup> The pronominal possessor *izwaris* does follow its possessum in this example.

(Ringe, 2006:64–5, 295). We are not, however, aware of any evidence that shows whether or not prepositions were used to express core possession.

#### 4. GERMAN

##### 4.1 *Historical development*

In Old High German (OHG, 750–1050)<sup>9</sup>, GEN was the main expression of possession and the possessor usually preceded the possessum as in (12a). This order was dominant throughout Middle High German (MHG, 1050-1350), but by the time of Early New High German (ENHG, 1350–1650), though it was still a possible order, as illustrated by (12b), the possessum more commonly preceded the possessor, as in (12c) (see for instance Lockwood, 1968:17).

- (12) a. in wales wambu (Tatian c 830, Lockwood, 1968:21)  
*in whale.GEN belly*  
'in the whale's belly'
- b. in des Walfisches Bauch (Luther Bible 1545, Lockwood, 1968:17)  
*in the.GEN whale.GEN belly*  
'in the whale's belly'
- c. der ging von dem Stuhl Gottes und des Lammes  
*he went from the chair God.GEN and the.GEN lamb.GEN*  
'he went from the chair of God and of the lamb'  
(Luther Bible 1545, Lockwood, 1968:17)

The genitive case was being affected by simplification by the end of OHG; the reduction of vowels in inflectional suffixes led to several distinct genitive suffixes falling out of use (Behaghel, 1923:479, Lockwood, 1968:18–9). By the time of MHG, further simplifications had taken place and elements which had previously showed agreement no longer carry genitive inflection (Schieb, 1970:370). During the NHG period even the suffix *-s*, so characteristic of the genitive (as shown by its later

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<sup>9</sup> The time span associated with historical periods of the languages are necessarily imprecise and subject to some disagreement. We will use the dates most commonly found in the literature, but emphasise the importance of recognising their vagueness.

reinterpretation as POSS-S), was lost from some nouns, only to be restored later: compare ENHG *des Leben* ‘the.GEN life-Ø’ and *des Ritter* ‘the.GEN knight-Ø’ with NHG *des Lebens* and *des Ritters*, respectively (von Polenz, 1991:164, Roelcke, 1997:131).

During the OHG period, a possessive construction involving a possessor in the dative (or the genitive) and a coreferential pronoun started to develop. It is traditionally argued that constructions which were ambiguous between a benefactive/recipient reading and a possessive reading, as in (13a) led to unambiguous dative possessive constructions such as (13b) (examples from Lockwood, 1968: 21, see also Burridge, 1995). The resulting construction in (13b) remains in present day German, it is the one we will refer to here as COREF PRON. We will return to the issue of its origin in section 9.

- (13) a. *thaz ih druhtine sînan sun souge* (Otfrid c. 865)  
*that I Lord.DAT his.DAT son suckle*  
 ‘that I may suckle the Lord’s son’ (possessive interpretation)  
 ‘that I may suckle the Lord’s son for him’ (non-possessive interpretation)
- b. *mit tiu infüorest tu demo gewaltîgen sîn zorn* (Notker c. 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> c)  
*thereby provoke you the.DAT mighty.DAT his ire*  
 ‘thereby didst thou provoke the ire of the mighty one’

The preposition *von*, which in Present-day German is used to express possession, existed already in OHG. Its original meaning was ‘away from’, a meaning it retains in Present-Day German. In MHG, *von* starts to appear in possessive constructions (Behaghel, 1924). At this stage, the cognate preposition was already in use to express possession in Middle Low German (Thomas Klein pc).

## 4.2 Present-Day German

### 4.2.1 GEN

The use of the GEN in Present Day German (PDG) is a controversial topic amongst linguists and non-linguists alike. This is illustrated by, for example, the title of the recent publication *Der Dativ ist dem Genitiv sein Tod* (Sick (2004) ‘The dative is the death of the genitive’ using the dative COREF PRON construction). Davies & Langer (2006) provide a historical overview of this debate. Though an alternative expression is frequently preferred, possessive marking by means of GEN is used in written formal registers of the standard language. Where the possessive functions as the subject of a nominalised verb, as in (14a), GEN is stillIn the GEN construction, possessors usually follow the possessum (14b). The possessor-possessum order can be found in (14c), but is not in common use and is generally held to be ungrammatical with feminine possessors. We will return to this point in section 9.

- (14) a. die Zerstörung der Stadt  
*the destruction the.GEN city*  
 ‘the destruction of the city’
- b. das Buch des Mannes / der Frau  
*the book the.MASC.GEN man.GEN the.FEM.GEN woman*  
 ‘the man’s / woman’s book’
- c. ?des Mannes / \*der Frau Buch  
*the.MASC.GEN man.GEN the.FEM.GEN book*  
 ‘the man’s book’

A handful of dialects located in the far south of the German language area still use GEN as the main marker of possession also in spoken and colloquial language.

#### 4.2.2 POSS-s

POSS-s, involving the invariant marker -s, is the most restricted means of expressing possession in German and is found especially in northern Germany (Sitta, 1998:243, Durrell, 2002:39). The possessor can generally only consist of a name or an unmodified kinship term.

- (15) a. Heikes      Buch  
           *Heike.POSS book*  
           ‘Heike’s book’
- b. Vaters      Buch  
           *father.POSS book*  
           ‘Father’s book’

The POSS-S construction can be distinguished from GEN in that the *-s* occurs also on feminine nouns, the possessor precedes the possessum and unlike the GEN ending from which it developed, POSS-S is always non-syllabic, the difference is illustrated in (16) (Zifonun, 2008:8).

- (16) a. Horsts / \*Horstes      Vorschlag  
           *Horst.GEN Horst.GEN suggestion*  
           ‘Horst’s suggestion’
- b. der Bau      des      Horsts / Horstes  
           *the building the.GEN nest.POSS nest.GEN*  
           ‘the building of the nest’

German POSS-S cannot appear on the right edge of postmodification of the possessor, as (17) shows. However, this may not be a structural constraint on the distribution of the POSS-S marker as such, but rather be due to the restriction on what type of possessor can occur.<sup>10</sup>

- (17)      \*Torben mit      dem roten Autos Buch  
           *Torben with the red car.POSS book*  
           ‘Torben with the red car’s book’

There is evidence of the POSS-S construction spreading beyond the environments described in the literature. We will return to these constructions and what they may tell us about the development of POSS-s in Germanic in section 9.

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<sup>10</sup> Zifonun (2001:4) claims that examples such as *Heike aus Kiel’s Buch* ‘Heike from Kiel.POSS-S book’, in which the postmodification denotes geographical origin, are acceptable to some speakers. However, none of the native speakers consulted during the writing of this paper considered the example acceptable.

### 4.2.3 COREF PRON

CO-REF PRON, which as we saw in section 4.1 was generally acceptable in earlier periods of German, is ‘not [...] considered part of the written standard’ (Davies and Langer, 2006:157); it does, however, appear in a wide range of German dialects. Possessors, which usually appear in the dative case, must be animate.<sup>11</sup> The variant of COREF PRON with a genitive possessor remains in some dialects (Davies and Langer, 2006:159).

- (18) a. (der) Heike      ihr    Buch  
          (*the.DAT*) *Heike*    *her*    *book*  
          ‘Heike’s book’
- b. meinem Vater    sein    Buch  
          *my.DAT*    *father*    *his*    *book*  
          ‘my father’s book’
- c. \*dem            Tisch seine Beine  
          *the.DAT*    *table*    *its*    *legs*  
          ‘the table’s legs’

### 4.2.4 PREP

Possession may be expressed using a construction with the preposition *von* ‘of’. PREP is the most flexible of all the means of expressing possession in German. It faces no restrictions on the type of possessor it may take; nor is it restricted to any particular register.

- (19) a. das Buch    von    meinem Vater  
          *the book*    *of*    *my.DAT* *father*  
          ‘the book of my father’

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<sup>11</sup> Pennsylvania German does use this construction for possessors that are not animate as in (i) (Burridge, 1989:68, Burridge, 1995:15)

(i) de Disch    sei    Bee  
    the table    its    legs  
    ‘the table’s legs’

- b. die Grenzen von der Stadt  
*the boundaries of the.DAT town*  
 ‘the boundaries of the town’

## 5 DUTCH

### 5.1 Historical development<sup>12</sup>

Old Dutch (c. 600–1200, ODu) had a four case system but one which was already in decline. The genitive denoted possession in its broader sense, but also occurred in positions where it was governed by verbs or adjectives. The possessor could precede or follow the possessum, it is not clear what conditioned the order (Quak and van der Horst, 2002:55–6). In Middle Dutch (MDu, c.1100–1500), possessor<possessum order (20a) became more frequent than possessum<possessor (20b), but both were still used (van Kerckvoorde, 1993:80). SPLIT POSS constructions (see section 2.3) also occurred (20c) (Vezzosi, 2000:122).

- (20) a. in des zeewes gronde  
*in the.GEN sea.GEN bottom*  
 ‘at the bottom of the sea’  
 (Floris ende Blancefloer c 1170, van Kerckvoorde 1993:80)
- b. Coninc der coningen ende heer der heeren  
*king the.PLU.GEN kings and lord the.PLU.GEN lords*  
 ‘king of kings and lord of lords’ (from Suster Bertken, 1426/7-1514)<sup>13</sup>
- c. des keyzers dochter van Griekenland (MDu, Vezzosi 2000:122)  
*the.GEN emperor.GEN daughter of Greece*  
 ‘the emperor of Greece’s daughter’

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch case system can be said to have disappeared. During the period of general case decline, GEN had begun its transition towards

<sup>12</sup> For various start and end dates of the periods of the Dutch language, see van der Wal & van Bree (1992: 93, 100).

<sup>13</sup> From , *Mi quam een schoon geluyt in mijn[en] oren*, <http://www.kb.nl/dichters/bertken/bertken-lied02.html>

becoming POSS-S: the masculine/neuter singular suffix *-s* became strongly associated with the genitive and, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, this ending was also used with feminine nouns (21a). At this stage, the possession started to be marked once only as in (21b), but into the 19<sup>th</sup> century such examples occurred side by side with agreeing examples such as (21c) (all examples from Komen, 1997:406–7).

- (21) a. *de vader des bruids*  
*the father the.GEN bride.GEN*  
 ‘the father of the bride’
- b. *zijn moeders woorden*  
*his mother.POSS words*  
 ‘his mother’s words’
- c. *mijns dochters recht*  
*my.GEN daughter.GEN right*  
 ‘my daughter’s right’

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, GEN had an archaic character and, by the end of that century, there was no genitive in the spoken language (de Vooy, 1970:174, van der Wal and van Bree, 1992, Komen, 1997:468).

The use of PREP as an expression of possession had existed since the ODu period. During the MDu period, the COREF PRON construction started to appear. The possessor would generally occur in the dative as in (22), but could also take the genitive or the nominative/accusative case (Vezzosi, 2000:123).

- (22) *Grote Kaerle zijn zoon* (Stoett, 1977:50)  
*great Charles.DAT his son*  
 ‘the son of Charles the Great’

## 5.2 *Present-day Dutch*

### 5.2.1 *Poss-s*

POSS-S, with the invariant marker *-s*, appears in written and spoken language. The range of possible possessors is restricted to proper names (23a), kinship terms,



including those modified by a possessive pronoun (23b) and names of professions (23c).<sup>14</sup> Booij (2002:35) states the generalisation as a restriction on the possessor being ‘inherently referential’.

- (23) a. Jaaps boek.  
*Jaap.POSS book*  
‘Jaap’s book’
- b. haar broers beste vriend<sup>15</sup>  
*her brother.POSS best friend*  
‘her brother’s best friend’
- c. de professors opvatting  
*the professor.POSS view*  
‘the professor’s view.’

POSS-S cannot be used when the possessor phrase contains postmodification as illustrated by (24). As in the case of German (cf 4.4.2), it is not clear whether this is a constraint on the placement of POSS-S or is due to more general restrictions on the possessor which do not refer specifically to postmodification.

- (24) \*Annelies uit Tilburgs boek.  
*Annelies from Tilburg.POSS book*  
‘Annelies from Tilburg’s book.’

### 5.2.2 COREF PRON

CO-REF PRON, which is associated with colloquial language, is restricted to animate (usually personal) possessors, where a certain familiarity is assumed. The pronoun

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<sup>14</sup> It should be pointed out that some of these examples are rare, so that for constructions like (23c), *professors* often occurs in compound like constructions *professors-muts* ‘professorial cap’, *professors-titel* ‘a professorial title’ or *professors-benoeming* ‘professorial appointment. The construction also becomes more rare if there is modification, then a PREP construction would tend to be used instead, cf *de huidige professors muts* ‘the current professor.POSS cap’ vs *de muts van de huidige professor* ‘the cap of the current professor’.

<sup>15</sup> [www.bollywood.nl/2007/06/05/mahima-chaudhary-is-in-blijde-verwachting/](http://www.bollywood.nl/2007/06/05/mahima-chaudhary-is-in-blijde-verwachting/)

agrees with the (natural) gender and number of the possessor (25a) to (25c). The possessor may be postmodified as in (25c).

- (25) a. mijn zus d'r vriend  
*my sister her friend*  
'my sister's friend'
- b. de man z'n hoofd  
*the man his head*  
'the man's head'
- c. Ik vind Peter en Sofie hun show te gek.<sup>16</sup>  
*I find Peter and Sofie their show too crazy*  
'I think Peter and Sofie's show is really great.'
- d. Annelies uit Tilburg haar/d'r boek  
*Annelies from Tilburg her book*  
'Annelies from Tilburg's book.'

### 5.2.3 PREP

PREP is found in all registers and with any type of possessor. The preposition *van* is in general use to express all aspects of possession.

- (26) a. eenboek van Siska  
*a book of Siska*  
'a book of Siska's'
- b. de wiel van de fiets  
*the wheel of the bicycle*  
'the wheel of the bicycle'

### 5.2.4. GEN

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<sup>16</sup> <http://files.stubru.be/node/37211?page=2> [accessed 4.6.09]

Dutch no longer has a case system but GEN remains as a means of marking possession, albeit in a much restricted form. Besides lexicalised fixed expressions, there exist partially fixed constructions, where either the possessum precedes the possessor and the genitive determiner *des* or *der* is used (27a) or the possessor comes first and the abbreviated genitive determiner 's is used (27b).<sup>17</sup>

- (27) a. zwart scherm<sup>18</sup> / geen poule<sup>19</sup> / de industrie<sup>20</sup> / des doods  
*black screen no group the industry the.GEN death.GEN*  
 'the black screen / not a group / the industry of death'
- b. 's werelds oudste popfestival<sup>21</sup> / eerste iPhone partij<sup>22</sup>  
*the.GEN world.GEN oldest popfestival first iPhone party*  
 'the world's oldest pop festival / the world's first iPhone party'

Contra, for example, Weerman & de Wit (1999:1164) and de Vries (2006:20), we have found evidence that GEN retains some limited productivity in present-day Dutch. New formations are rare but are attested in written and spoken language, as in (28a) and (28b), respectively. The order is then always possessum<possessor.

- (28) a. de onbekende wereld der fietsverhuurders (INL 38 mil corpus)  
*the unknown world the.GEN.PLU bicycle leaser.PLU*  
 'the unknown world of the bicycle leasers'
- b. het probleem der overbevolking (CGN fv600879)  
*the problem the.GEN overpopulation*  
 'the problem of overpopulation'

<sup>17</sup> Examples such as (27a) can also be found with a feminine or plural possessor, as in *in de tand der tijd* 'the tooth the.GEN time' or *in de loop der eeuwen* 'in the run the.GEN centuries'.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.zdnet.be/news/110606/microsoft-onderzoekt-zwart-scherm-des-doods/> [accessed 2.12.09]

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.fcupdate.nl/nieuws/2009/12/04/een-keer-geen-poule-des-doods-voor-oranje\\_134170/](http://www.fcupdate.nl/nieuws/2009/12/04/een-keer-geen-poule-des-doods-voor-oranje_134170/) [accessed 2.12.09]

<sup>20</sup> <http://psychiatrie-industrie-des-doods.nl/> [accessed 2.12.09]

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.atp.nl/page.php?id=4643> [accessed 2.6.09]

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.onemorething.nl/?p=indexarticles&category=iPhone> [accessed 2.6.09]

## 6. AFRIKAANS

### 6.1 *Historical development*

Present-day Afrikaans has developed from the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch of the original settlers. Views vary as to when Afrikaans should be considered an independent language: Vekeman & Ecke (1992:225) consider Afrikaans an individual language by 1780, while Lockwood (1972:102) places the start date about a century later. In 1925 Afrikaans was recognised as an official language (Ponelis, 1993:54). Of the expressions of possession that were present in the Dutch of the first settlers, COREF PRON and PREP have remained. In early Afrikaans, the pronoun agreed in number and gender with the possessor, as in (29) (Ponelis, 1993:233–5). These forms remained in use into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- |      |    |                         |              |                |      |
|------|----|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|------|
| (29) | a. | oom                     | zijn         | vrouw          | 1888 |
|      |    | <i>uncle</i>            | <i>his</i>   | <i>wife</i>    |      |
|      |    | '(my) uncle's wife'     |              |                |      |
|      | b. | Aletta                  | haar         | kamer          | 1925 |
|      |    | <i>Aletta</i>           | <i>her</i>   | <i>room</i>    |      |
|      |    | 'Aletta's room'         |              |                |      |
|      | c. | de Hartmans             | hulle        | vrinde         | 1851 |
|      |    | <i>the Hartmans</i>     | <i>their</i> | <i>friends</i> |      |
|      |    | 'the Hartmans' friends' |              |                |      |

### 6.2 *Present Day Afrikaans*

#### 6.2.1 *COREF PRON*

COREF PRON is the dominant possessive construction in present day Afrikaans, but it has developed differently from its Dutch counterpart. The marker no longer agrees with the possessor, but has an invariant form *se*. As the examples in (30) illustrate, there are no restrictions on the possessor (Donaldson, 1993:98–9, Hantson, 2001:10). The possessor phrase may contain postmodification (31).

- (30) a. haar tante se aankoms<sup>23</sup>  
*her aunt PRON arrival*  
 ‘her aunt’s arrival’
- b. die VN se Veiligheidsraad<sup>24</sup>  
*the UN PRON security council*  
 ‘the UN’s security council’
- c. die koerant se toekoms-visie<sup>25</sup>  
*the newspaper PRON future-vision*  
 ‘the newspaper’s vision of the future’

- (31) Vyf van die twaalf mense wat nog in die hospital behandel word,  
*five of the twelve people REL still in the hospita treated become*

se toestand is kritiek (Donaldson, 1993:98)  
*PRON condition is critical*  
 ‘The condition of five of the twelve people that are still being treated  
 in hospital is critical’

The COREF PRON construction can be used not just with core possession, but also in the marking of measurement for instance.

- (32) a. ‘n week se geld<sup>26</sup>  
*a week PRON money*  
 ‘a week’s money’
- b. tien rand se Sasol<sup>27</sup>  
*ten rand PRON Sasol*  
 ‘ten rand’s worth of Sasol (petrol)’

### 6.2.2 PREP

There is a PREP construction with *van* which is less commonly used than COREF PRON (Donaldson, 1993:99). Where the preposition is used, a COREF PRON construction

<sup>23</sup> [www.freewebs.com/esmith/kindvanliefde.htm](http://www.freewebs.com/esmith/kindvanliefde.htm)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.dieburger.com/Stories/Opinion/19.0.1180684660.aspx> [accessed 22.12.2008].

<sup>25</sup> [www.dieburger.com/Stories/Opinion/Letters/19.0.1180684886.aspx](http://www.dieburger.com/Stories/Opinion/Letters/19.0.1180684886.aspx) [accessed 22.12.08].

<sup>26</sup> [www.republikein.com.na/politiek-en-nasionale/transnamib-stakers-verloor-and-n-week-se-geld.73755.php](http://www.republikein.com.na/politiek-en-nasionale/transnamib-stakers-verloor-and-n-week-se-geld.73755.php) [accessed 18.09.09]

<sup>27</sup> [pooks.woes.co.za/gedigte/vertoon/3642\\_Antwoord\\_op\\_die\\_Energie-Krisis.htm](http://pooks.woes.co.za/gedigte/vertoon/3642_Antwoord_op_die_Energie-Krisis.htm)

would have been grammatical, but PREP may be used in order to have the possessum precede the possessor, or as in (11b) to avoid more than one *se* in any one possessor phrase.

- (33) a. die Olympiese Spele van die danswêreld<sup>28</sup>  
*the Olympic Games of the dance world*  
 ‘the Olympic Games of the dance world’
- b. die naam van die man, wie se ouderdom rondom 30 geskat word<sup>29</sup>  
*the name of the man who PRON age about 30 estimated became*  
 ‘the name of the man, whose age was estimated at about 30’

## 7 ENGLISH

### 7.1 Historical development

Despite a decline in the case system throughout the Old English period (OE, before c 1100), by the end of the period GEN remained ‘still almost the exclusive possessive construction’ (Rosenbach et al (2000:184); see also Yngve (1975:47)). As in the other Germanic languages, GEN was also governed by verbs and prepositions. The possessor could either precede (34a) or follow (34b) the possessum (Seppänen, 1997:194, Lightfoot, 1999:117). After 900 AD, possessor-possessum order began to dominate (Yngve, 1975:47).

- (34) a. Ic eom Hroðgares ar ond ombiht  
*I am Hrothgar.GEN messenger and officer*  
 ‘I am Hrothgar’s messenger and officer’ (Beowulf, van Gelderen, 2006:57)
- b. Lufu godes and manna (Ælfric, Lightfoot, 2006:116)  
*love god.GEN and men.GEN*  
 ‘love of God and of men’

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.dieburger.com/Stories/Entertainment/19.0.118064562.aspx> [accessed 22.12.08].

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.dieburger.com/Stories/News/19.0.1178102931.aspx> [accessed 14.1.09].

By the Middle English period (ME, c. 1100–1500), the use of GEN had become more restricted than in OE, for instance in that it was no longer governed by verbs and prepositions. With respect to possession, the order became firm, with the possessor preceding the possessum (Seppänen, 1997:194). During this period, the behaviour of the marker *s* starts to exhibit evidence of a change from the distribution of an agreeing case marker to that of the once-only POSS-S marker. It spreads across the paradigm from singular masculine and neuter nouns to feminine and plural nouns and less frequently displays agreement (Seppänen, 1997:194, Rosenbach and Vezzosi, 1999:38). The *Peterborough Chronicle* (1122-1154) illustrates the transitional nature of possessive marking during very early ME: alongside typical OE constructions in which all members of the possessor NP are inflected (35a), there exist constructions in which only the possessor noun carries an ending, i.e. in which the *-s* is a once-only marker of possession (35b) (Shores, 1971:166–7).

- (35) a. þes cwenes chancellor  
*the.GEN queen.GEN chancellor*  
 ‘the queen’s chancellor’
- b. þa mannes throte  
*the man.GEN throat*  
 ‘the man’s throat’

By Early Modern English (EModE, c. 1500–1700) the behaviour of *s* was that of a POSS-S element, for instance in that with few exceptions, it was marked only once. Rosenbach et al (2000:186) show that it occurred almost exclusively with animate possessors.

The development from GEN to POSS-S can be said to consist of three related changes: the marker *-s* takes over the paradigm; possession is marked only once in a possessor phrase; and the *-s* is no longer associated with the head, but with the right edge of the possessor phrase. The last of these changes is the one for which the evidence is most controversial. Possessor phrases containing postmodification are crucial in this debate, in particular, examples of POSTMOD POSS-S (the so-called ‘group genitive’, cf section 2.3) would show that the marker is unambiguously right edge. This construction type, exemplified in (36), emerged during the second half of the ME period; its earliest recorded use is generally agreed to be in Chaucer’s works (see

Mustanoja, 1960:79, Allen, 2003:7). Nevalainen (2006:76) describes it as ‘well established’ by EME.

- (36) a. this god of loves ypocryte (Chaucer, Roscow, 1970:42)  
*this god of love.POSS hypocrite*  
 ‘this god of love’s hypocrite’
- b. þe kyng of Fraunces men (Trevisa, Allen, 1997:121)  
*the king of France.POSS men*  
 ‘the king of France’s men’

The POSTMOD POSS-S construction was restricted to phrases with short postmodification, usually involving a preposition phrase with *of*, even into EME (see for instance Görlach, 1991:82, Allen, 1997:121). In his corpus study of 17<sup>th</sup> century English, Altenberg finds no creative or ad hoc group genitive possessors: ‘group genitives like *the man I saw yesterday’s wife* do not occur in the corpus’ (1982:90). Similarly, Rosenbach & Vezzosi observe that all their attested group genitives in late 16<sup>th</sup>–early 17<sup>th</sup> century Scots feature a possessor with the structure TITLE OF PLACE + -s, leading them to suggest that ‘this type of phrase is analyzed as a proper name, such as *king James*, and not as a complex NP’ (1999:45).

The construction type we refer to as SPLIT POSS (cf section 2.3), in which postmodification is placed after the possessum, allowing the marker to be attached to the head noun of the possessor NP, was ‘extremely common’ in ME (Mustanoja, 1960:78, Allen, 2002:73, Nielsen, 2005:79).<sup>30</sup> As in the case of POSTMOD POSS-S, the postmodification tended to consist of a prepositional phrase denoting origin, usually – possibly exclusively – with *of*. An example is provided in (37a). As (37b) shows, this construction type could also be used when possession was marked more than once.

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<sup>30</sup> Allen (2002: 73) prefers the term ‘combined genitive’ for this construction because it ‘involve[s] a combination of a morphological genitive marker and a prepositional phrase’. She reserves the term ‘split genitive’ for a construction in which the possessor consisted of a name and a title, where the title occurred after the possessum, as in (i) (Allen 2008: 92-5; see also Lightfoot 1999: 117). This construction was present in OE and continued to be used in ME.

(i) *on Herodes dagum cyninges* (Roscow  
 1970: 40)  
 in Herod.GEN days king.GEN  
 ‘in King Herod’s days’



- (37) a. the wyues loue of Bathe (Chaucer, Jespersen  
1894: 293)  
*the wife.POSS love of Bath*  
'the wife of Bath's love'
- b. þes eorles sunu of Angeow  
*the.GEN count.GEN son of Anjou*  
'the son of the count of Anjou' (Peterborough Chronicle, Shores 1971: 168)

The accepted position in the literature is that the POSTMOD POSS — the group genitive — fully superseded the SPLIT POSS, and that the split genitive was last attested in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century (Lightfoot, 1999:125, Fischer et al., 2000:81, Allen, 2003:14, Nielsen, 2005:255, Fischer and van der Wurff, 2006:119). As we shall see in section 7.2.1, a SPLIT POSS construction is attested also in present day English.

Rosenbach & Vezzosi (1999:43) record examples from EModE in which the postmodification immediately follows the possessor, but the POSS-S marker still appears only on the head noun, as in (38).

- (38) a. the kinges of Seuthen embassadeur (Edward VI, Rosenbach & Vezzosi  
1999: 43)  
'the king of Zeuthen's ambassador'
- b. the erle's of Warwick patent (Edward VI, Rosenbach & Vezzosi  
1999: 43)  
'the Earl of Warwick's patent'

Examples such as (39), referred to here as the SEPARATED GENITIVE and first attested in the 13th century, have been used to argue that the possessive *s* developed from the pronoun *his* and hence that English had a COREF PRON construction (Janda, 1980, Lightfoot, 1999, Weerman and de Wit, 1999).<sup>31</sup>

- (39) a. a preste his house (John of Trevisa Waldron,  
1989:196)  
*a priest POSS house*  
'a priest's house'

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<sup>31</sup> Although *his* has come to be the marker most associated with this construction, at this time the marker was generally *ys* or *is* (Juvonen 2008).

- b. Robert his bedde (John of Trevisa Waldron,  
1989:196)  
*Robert POSS bed*  
'Robert's bed'

Allen (1997, 2003, 2008:225ff) does, however, argue convincingly that *his* (*ys* or *is*) in such examples were actually orthographical variants of *s*. Examples such as (40a), in which *his* is used with a feminine possessor, supports this view. There are some examples involving an agreeing pronoun in OE, as in (40b). However, these always involve loan names which would not have fitted easily into the OE inflectional system (see Mitchell, 1985:121). Allen (2008:227–8) states that there is no evidence to suggest that such examples were the starting point of that which we have referred to as the COREF PRON construction. Instead, she suggests that such constructions are most likely the result of a topicalisation of the possessor, so that the pronoun is a genuine resumptive pronoun.

- (40) a. Gwenayfer his love (Lawman, Mustanoja, 1960:161)  
*Gwenayfer POSS love*  
'Guinevere's love'
- b. Asia and Europe hiera land-gemircu (Seppänen, 1997:202, Allen, 2008:227)  
*Asia and Europe PRON boundaries*  
'Asia and Europe their boundaries'

A more general use of an agreeing pronoun, as in (41), is a later development (in EModE), which suggests that it arises from a reinterpretation of the orthographical variant *his* rather than a genuine COREF PRON.

- (41) a. Lucilla hir company (Lyly, Barber, 1997:146)  
*Lucilla PRON company*  
'Lucilla's company'
- b. the vtopians their creditors (More, Barber, 1997:146)  
*the Utopians PRON creditors*  
'the Utopians' creditors'

Further evidence against an explanation of the SEPARATED GENITIVE as a COREF PRON comes from examples such as (42). If such examples arose from a



- b. Is hem    ðæt heafod hinden    grene  
       is he.DAT the head behind green  
       ‘the back of his head is green’

The PREP construction with *of* appears in OE and experiences a strong increase in productivity from late OE, to the mid-ME period, by which time it had become the most frequent possessive construction (Mustanoja, 1960:74). As Yngve (1975:53) notes, the rise in the use of PREP, in which the possessum precedes the possessor, coincided with the time when the possessor-possessum order began to dominate in GEN constructions.

## 7.2 *Present day English*

### 7.2.1 *POSS-S*

Having experienced a decline during ME and EModE, POSS-S has undergone a resurgence in modern English (Kreyer, 2003:170). Present-day English POSS-S has been widely studied, particularly regarding the division of labour between POSS-S and PREP, see for instance Kreyer (2003), Rosenbach (2003) and Hinrichs and Szmrecsanyi (2007), but also reference grammars such as Quirk et al (1985), Biber et al (1999) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002). A number of semantic, structural and phonological factors play a role in the choice, with animacy of the possessor being the major one (Rosenbach, 2002). The morpho-syntactic status of the English possessive *s* has also received attention in the literature, in particular in relation to the categories affix and clitic. It has generally been assumed to be a right edge clitic, but it displays interaction with the element to which it attaches which is untypical of clitics and hence it has been referred to by some as a phrasal affix (for different arguments see Anderson, 1984, Zwicky, 1987, Lapointe, 1990, Lapointe, 1992, Miller and Halpern, 1993, Anderson, 2005). We will not have much to say here on this aspect of the behaviour of POSS-S.

POSTMOD POSS-S, commonly referred to as the ‘group genitive’ after Jespersen (1894), is generally held to be relatively unconstrained in English, though it is assumed to be more common in informal or spoken language (see for instance standard grammars such as Quirk et al., 1985, Biber et al., 1999, Huddleston and Pullum, 2002). However, work on spoken corpora show that the construction is quite rare in present-day English (see Scott et al., 2007). In the spoken component of the BNC, POSTMOD POSS-S occurs almost exclusively with possessors that are more or less fixed expressions or lexicalised structures with gaps into which nouns may be entered (e.g. ‘the people of X’, ‘X as a whole’, etc.), as shown in (45). More creative examples can be found in informal language, as in (46).

- (45) a. the people of Leicestershire’s land (BNC: KGM 022)  
b. the leader of the council’s shirt (BNC: JT7 095)  
d. China as a whole’s economic development (BNC: JJN 426)

- (46) a. the guy next to me’s last night here at the call center<sup>33</sup>  
b. the girl who was singing’s name<sup>34</sup>  
c. the guy in the green’s job<sup>35</sup>

Scott et al (2007) show that a SPLIT POSS construction, i.e. examples where the postmodification is postposed to follow the possessum, is roughly as common as creative POSTMOD POSS-S examples in the spoken BNC corpus. Examples can be found in (47), where (47c) and (47d) show that these can involve more extensive postmodification than typically found in POSTMOD POSS-S.

- (47) a. the manager’s secretary of the Co-op (BNC: FYH 383)  
b. the gentleman’s name with the tape recorder (BNC: FM7 0008)  
c. a person’s mouth that has epilepsy (BNC: F8C 105)  
d. somebody’s desk who was actually supposed to carry out the work (BNC: H48 740)

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<sup>33</sup> <http://lynchedmonkey.blogspot.com/2003/01/so-its-guy-next-to-mes-last-night-here.html> [accessed 5.2.09].

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.restaurantthing.com/ca/on/toronto/restaurant.php?id=3437&tab=general> [accessed 5.2.09].

<sup>35</sup> <http://scienceforfood.blogspot.com/2009/01/snake-charmer.html> [accessed 5.2.09].

### 7.2.2 *PREP*

*PREP* is the most frequent possessive construction overall in present-day English (Scott et al., 2007). Though generally associated with inanimate possessors, it is also frequently used with animate possessors, in particular where some factor militates against the use of *POSS-S*, as in (48c), where the possessor contains postmodification.

- (48) a. the age of the person (BNC: KRG 0235)  
b. the first novel of George Eliot (BNC: KRG 0956)  
c. the foot of the man at the end of the row (BNC: FSN 0790)

## 8 SCANDINAVIAN

### 8.1 *Historical development*

The modern Scandinavian languages have a common antecedent in Old Norse, so that we will deal with their history in one section. The modern languages will be dealt with as two groups because of their relative similarity, the Insular Scandinavian languages — Icelandic and Faroese — which retained a case system, and the Mainland Scandinavian languages — Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish — which did not.

In Old Norse, possession was indicated by *GEN*, which was also governed by a number of verbs, adjectives and prepositions (Askedal, 2003a:26). Both possessor-possessum and possessum-possessor order was possible (49). Wessén (1956:103–6) provides some generalisations about order in early Swedish texts, but states that the order was relatively free. According to Faarlund (2002:729), the latter was more common for inanimate possessors and the former for animate possessors, however, we are not aware of any quantitative study of this.

- (49) a. allra Svía þing (Askedal, 2003a:29)  
*all Swede.GEN parliament*  
'all Swedes' parliament'

- b. þræll konungs (Askedal, 2003a:29)  
*slave king.GEN*  
 ‘the king’s slave’

The Insular Scandinavian languages are the only present-day Germanic languages which retain several genitive endings, the allocation of which depends on the gender and class of the possessor noun. The deterioration of the case system in Mainland Scandinavian started in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the case system was essentially lost in all the Mainland Scandinavian languages. In the genitive, *(e)s* took over and agreement was lost so that the case tended to be marked once only, as in the Old Swedish (50).

- (50) min fadhers wiliu (Norde, 2001:260)  
*my.Ø father.MASC.SG.GEN consent.FEM.SG.OBL*  
 ‘my father’s consent’

PREP was in use as a means of expressing possession in the early stages of the Scandinavian languages.

## 8.2 Present-Day Insular Scandinavian

### 8.2.1 Icelandic

#### 8.2.1.1 GEN

Icelandic is the only Germanic language where GEN is the most commonly used expression of possession. There are no constraints on what types of possessors can be expressed this way. The possessor usually follows the possessum as in (51a), although the two can be reversed (51b) for emphasis. In the spoken language, a different construction, combining the genitive with a possessive pronoun (agreeing in gender and number with the possessor), is preferred with proper name possessors, as illustrated in (51c).

- (51) a. leikfang barnsins (Pétursson 1978: 134)  
*toy child.GEN.DEF.GEN*  
 ‘the child’s toy’

- b. Haraldar hús (en ekki Jóns) (Thráinsson, 1994:167)  
*Harald.GEN house (and not Jón.GEN)*  
 ‘Harald’s house (and not Jón’s)’
- c. bloggið hans Lárusar<sup>36</sup>  
*blog.DEF his Lárus.GEN*  
 ‘Lárus’s blog’

### 8.2.1.2 PREP

Because of the unrestrictedness of the use of GEN in Icelandic, PREP is used less frequently than in the other Germanic languages. Icelandic PREP constructions use mainly the prepositions *á* and *í*, both of which occur most frequently with constructions involving a body part possessum (examples from Thráinsson, 2007:94, see also Stolz et al., 2008:143–4, 221).

- (52) a. þakið á húsinu  
*roof.DEF at house.DEF.DAT*  
 ‘the roof of the house’
- b. tennurna í henna  
*teeth.DEF in she.DAT*  
 ‘her teeth’

## 8.2.2 Faroese

### 8.2.2.1 GEN

The Faroese GEN was already in decline in older periods and is often avoided in the modern language, especially in everyday or spoken language (Lockwood, 1950:97, Barnes and Weyhe, 1994:198). It is sometimes still used in the written language, which Hamre (1961:232) ascribes (at least partly) to deliberate prescriptive attempts to reintroduce the case. Barnes and Weyhe (1994:197–8) note that the GEN is used less frequently with nouns whose genitive is not *s*, such as plural and feminine nouns. The possessor may either precede or follow the possessum, as shown by (53a) and (53b),

<sup>36</sup> <http://baldvinj.blog.is/blog/baldvinj/entry/173532/> [accessed 20.2.09]



although the former order is most frequent (Hamre, 1961:241). The examples are taken from Lockwood (1955:104).

- (53) a. móttakarans undirskrift  
*recipient.DEF.GEN signature*  
 ‘the recipient’s signature’
- b. undirskrift móttakarans  
*signature recipient.DEF.GEN*  
 ‘the recipient’s signature’

#### 8.2.2.2 *PREP*

*PREP* is the most common expression of possession in Faroese. The preposition *hjá* is the most versatile in this construction, but other prepositions are also used, for instance *at* and *til* for personal and kinship relationships (Stolz and Gorsemann, 2001:580, Barnes, 2005:1581).

- (54) Hesturin hjá gentuni  
*horse.NOM.DEF with girl.DAT.DEF*  
 ‘the girl’s horse’

#### 8.2.2.3 *The SA construction*

A relatively recent development in Faroese is a construction in which the possessor is marked by *-sa(r)*. This construction has a number of interesting properties from a comparative Germanic perspective. It started to appear in print by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and its origin is a matter of debate (Lockwood, 1950:96, Staksberg, 1996, Thráinsson et al., 2004, Barnes, 2005:1581, Harries, 2008). Harries (2008) suggests that it may have developed from the reflexive pronoun *sær* or the possessive pronoun *han(sara)* so that it is similar in origin to COREF PRON. It does indeed share a number of properties with COREF PRON constructions in other Germanic languages, for instance in that it is limited to possessors consisting of proper nouns or kinship terms and in that the possessor noun phrase obligatorily appears in its oblique form, as illustrated in (55a). The *sa* has the properties of a bound element and is written as such, but it can take scope over a co-ordinated noun phrase as in (55b) and can occur

on possessors involving postmodification (55c). Note that in all cases, the head(s) of the possessor will occur in an OBL case even if *sa* is not attached directly to it (Harries, 2008).<sup>37</sup>

- (55) a. Mammusar        lítli skattur  
           *mummy.OBL.SA    little treasure*  
           ‘mummy’s little treasure’
- b. Beintu        og Annusa        bók  
           *Beinta.OBL and Anna.OBL.SA book*  
           ‘Beinta and Anna’s book’
- c. Annu        á posthúsinumsa bilur  
           *Annu.OBL at postoffice.DAT.SA car*<sup>38</sup>  
           ‘Anna at the post office’s car’

The *-sa* construction can also occur following verbs and prepositions which historically govern GEN, as in (56). This suggests that it is taking over the role of GEN beyond the expression of possession (Harries, 2008).

- (56) a. mammusa vegna  
           *mother.SA because of*  
           ‘because of mother’
- b. til abbasa  
           *to grandfather.SA*  
           ‘to grandfather’

#### 8.2.2.4 ACCUSATIVE CASE

In constructions denoting possession in personal relationships, possession may be marked by the accusative case on the possessor, as in (57). In earlier stages of the language, this construction was used beyond personal relationships, but has been in decline since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Barnes and Weyhe, 1994:208).

<sup>37</sup> There is some uncertainty amongst native speakers as to the acceptability of constructions of the types illustrated in (55c), but many accept it.

<sup>38</sup> The dative case of *posthúsinum* is due to the preposition which governs it and is not connected to the occurrence of *sa*.

- (57) dóttir ein ameríkanski Hermann (FTS hós:02-12:MJ:12 merkir)  
*daughter.NOM a.M.ACC American soldier.ACC*  
 og eina japanska konu  
*and a F.ACC Japanese woman.F.ACC*  
 ‘daughter of an American soldier and a Japanese woman’

### 8.3 Present-Day Mainland Scandinavian

#### 8.3.1 POSS-s

POSS-s, which developed from the Old Norse masculine and neuter genitive singular ending, is used in all Mainland Scandinavian languages. In all three languages, there are few restrictions on what possessors can be used with POSS-s, as illustrated by (58) to (60).<sup>39</sup> The c. examples show that in all three languages, POSS-s can take scope over co-ordinated possessors, though both conjuncts can also be marked separately. As will be clear in the coming sections, Norwegian has a broader range of expressions of possession than the other MSc languages, so that it may be assumed that POSS-s is used less frequently in Norwegian than in Swedish and Danish, but we are not aware of any detailed studies of this (Torp, 1992:161 claims that it is rare in both spoken and written Norwegian, but does not provide the data to support the claim). The examples in (60) are all from *Bokmål*, where POSS-s is more common than the alternative COREF PRON (see 8.3.2). Similar examples can be found in *Nynorsk*, but in this variety, COREF PRON dominates and POSS-s is mainly used for proper nouns and nouns referring to humans (Faarlund et al., 1997:258–60).

- (58) a. de svenske borgerlige ministres begrundelser for fiaskoen (Korpus DK)  
*the Swedish right of centre minister.POSS reasons for fiasco.DEF*  
 ‘the Swedish right of centre ministers’ reasons for the fiasco’
- b. togets computer (KorpusDK)  
*train.DEF.POSS computer*  
 ‘the train’s computer.’

<sup>39</sup> Claims have been made both for Danish and Swedish that POSS-s is less common with inanimate possessors (Allan et al. 2000: 29 and Telemann et al. 1999: 32). However, examples such as (58b) and (59b) occur frequently in both written and spoken Danish and Swedish.

- c. Adam og Saras brevkasse<sup>40</sup>  
*Adam and Sara.POSS postbox*  
 ‘Adam and Sara’s postbox’
- (59) a. medlemmarnas spontana önsknningar (GSLC: A0636011)  
*member.DEF.POSS spontaneous wishes*  
 ‘the members’ spontaneous wishes’
- b. vägens mittlinje (GSLC: A8404011)  
*road.DEF.POSS middle line*  
 ‘the middle line of the road’
- c. flickor och pojkars prat och relationer till läraren (Press 98)  
*girls and boys.POSS talk and relations to teacher.DEF*  
 ‘girls’ and boys’ talking and relations to the teacher’
- (60) a. Sentrum-venstre-koalisjonens seier (Oslo: AV/Af96/01)  
*centre-left-coalition.DEF.POSS victory*  
 ‘the centre-left coalition’s victory’
- b. de forskjellige narkotikums effect (Oslo: AV/Ad96/01)<sup>41</sup>  
*the various narcotics.POSS effect*  
 ‘the effect of the various drugs’
- c. barn og unges psykiske helse (Oslo: AV/Af94/01)  
*children and young.POSS psychological health*  
 ‘this affects the mental health of children and young people’

As for English, examples where the head noun is not the rightmost element of the noun phrase are of special interest since these form evidence that POSS is truly a right edge element in these languages. In all languages, examples in which the POSS-S occurs on a non-head element, i.e. POSTMOD POSS-S (see section 2.3), can be found, as illustrated by (61)-(63).

- (61) a. dronningen af Sabas mørke hår på benene (KorpusDK)  
*queen.DEF of Saba.POSS dark hair on legs.DEF*  
 ‘the queen of Saba’s dark hair on her legs’

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.dr.dk/p3/formiddagen/artikler/20080917130945.htm> [accessed 1.5.09]

<sup>41</sup> Formally, *narkotikum* is the singular of *narkotika*, but it is used here as a plural form.

- b. Gry på redaktionens mor<sup>42</sup>  
*Gry on production team.DEF.POSS mother*  
 ‘Gry from the production team’s mother’
- c. hende-der-jeg-aldrig-kan-huske-navnet-på’s-mor<sup>43</sup>  
*her-who-I-never-can-remember-name.DEF-on.POSS-mother*  
 ‘her whose name I can never remember’s mother’
- (62) a. den vanlige mannen på gatans liv (GSLC: V0644021)  
*the common man.DEF on street.DEF.POSS life*  
 ‘the life of the common man’
- b. företaget som jag jobbar på’s hemsida<sup>44</sup>  
*company.DEF REL I work on.POSS homepage*  
 ‘the company I work for’s homepage’
- c. för de som mår dåligts skull<sup>45</sup>  
*for they REL feel badly.POSS sake*  
 ‘for the sake of those who aren’t feeling well’
- (63) a. ungdommen av idags store ansvar (Knudsen, 1967:60)  
*youth.DEF of today.POSS big responsibility*  
 ‘the youth of today’s big responsibility’
- b. Universitetet i Oslo museer<sup>46</sup> Norwegian  
*university.DEF in Oslo.POSS museums*  
 ‘the University of Oslo’s museums’
- c. mannen på verkstedets bil (Faarlund et al., 1997:256)  
*man.DEF on workshop.POSS car*  
 ‘the man in the workshop’s car’

Though grammatical, POSTMOD POSS-S are restricted in usage, they are particularly common with relatively set phrases, such as the a. examples. The punctuation in (61c) and (62b) indicate that there is some uncertainty around these constructions; POSS-S does not normally involve any punctuation in MSc. Corpus data for Swedish suggest

<sup>42</sup> *De sorte spejdere*, Danmarks Radio P3, 23.4.08

<sup>43</sup> <http://blogbot.dk/?blogId=11900&start=2008-06-10T14:13:38> [accessed 8.1.09]

<sup>44</sup> <http://velar.wordpress.com/2007/12/14/luciatag/> [accessed 8.1.09]

<sup>45</sup> <http://blogg.passagen.se/liljones/date/20070111> [accessed 8.1.09]

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.uio.no/museum/> [accessed 12.1.09]

that POSTMOD POSS-S constructions are rare: only one example appears in the GSLC (reproduced above as (62a)).<sup>47</sup> Torp (1992:161) also comments that such constructions are rare in written and spoken Norwegian.

Clearer evidence that POSTMOD POSS-S constructions are avoided comes from the existence of SPLIT POSS (see section 2.3), where the postmodification has been postposed to follow the possessum, hence allowing the *s* to appear on the head noun.

- (64) a. Holger Vestergaards telefonnummer fra Ny Alliance<sup>48</sup> Danish  
*Holger Vestergaard.POSS telephone number from New Alliance*  
 ‘The telephone number of Holger Vestergaard from New Alliance’
- b. dom anställdas synpunkt som Swedish  
*those employees.POSS point of view REL*  
*ska jobba med djuren (GSLC: A0636011)*  
*shall work with animals.DEF*  
 ‘the point of view of those employees who are going to work with  
 the animals’

The uncertainty around POSTMOD POSS-S is also evidenced by the use of doubly marked possessors, as in (65).

- (65) a. kongens af Danmarks rige (Knudsen, 1967:59) Danish  
*king.DEF.POSS of Denmark.POSS country*  
 ‘the king of Denmark’s empire’
- b. kungens av Sveriges slott<sup>49</sup> Swedish  
*king.DEF.POSS of Sweden.POSS castle*  
 ‘the king of Sweden’s castle’

In very formal written Swedish, there is also a construction in which the POSS-S appears on the head, immediately followed by the possessum, giving examples such as (66). The construction is rare in naturally occurring language, but it is referred to by Teleman et al (1999:3, 79) and examples from corpora are provided by Börjars (2003:149).

<sup>47</sup> The GSLC contains 2264 POSS-S constructions.

<sup>48</sup> *De sorte spejdere*, Danmarks Radio P3, 6.2.08

<sup>49</sup> There is an interesting discussion of this construction at [http://groups.google.com/group/swenet.svenska/browse\\_thread/thread/49f6545073106904/83bb527ba96ec236?#](http://groups.google.com/group/swenet.svenska/browse_thread/thread/49f6545073106904/83bb527ba96ec236?#). Some contributors to the discussion also accept *Kungens av Sverige slot* ‘king.DEF.POSS of Sweden castle’, whereas some reject *Kungen av Sveriges slott* ‘king.DEF of Sweden.POSS castle’.

- (66) den svenska kulturens i Finland nuvarande läge (Knudsen, 1967:59)  
*the Swedish culture.DEF.POSS in Finland current situation*  
 ‘the current situation of Swedish culture in Finland’

### 8.3.2 COREF PRON

In Norwegian, COREF PRON is an alternative to POSS-S. It is traditionally associated more with *Nynorsk* than with *Bokmål*, but is increasing in use also in *Bokmål* (Faarlund et al., 1997:258–60). Askedal (2003b:141) describes it as the most productive possessive construction in Norwegian. The construction is not used in the other standard MSc languages. Unlike the other Germanic languages which have a COREF PRON construction, standard Norwegian uses a reflexive pronoun, which agrees in gender and number with the possessum.<sup>50</sup> The construction is often referred to as *garpegenitiv* in Norwegian, *garpe* being a derogatory term for a Hanseatic merchant. This term reflects the common assumption that the construction entered Norwegian via contact with Middle Low German-speaking merchants during the Hanseatic period; (see for example Askedal, 1994:248, Faarlund et al., 1997:259, Askedal, 2003b:141). One argument put forward in support of the borrowing hypothesis is the claim that the reflexive is an unexpected form in this position and that *sin* is used because of its similarity to the non-reflexive MLG *sīn* (Knudsen, 1967:65). However, it has been argued that the use of a reflexive in this environment need not be the result of foreign influence. The argument goes back at least to Östergren (1902), but has been defended more recently by Lødrup (1989:52–4) and Perridon (1996:384–6). The COREF PRON need not then be a borrowing from MLG, but could be an independent development in Norwegian.<sup>51</sup> We are not in a position to judge the historical evidence and it will not be essential to our conclusions.<sup>52</sup>

The construction is more common with animate possessors, but examples such as (67c) can also be found.

<sup>50</sup> Some Norwegian and Danish dialects use a COREF PRON construction with a non-reflexive pronoun, but the construction can only be used with possessors which are personal names or kinship terms (Knudsen, 1967:62, Haugen, 1976:296, Torp, 1992:151, Askedal, 2003b:141).

<sup>51</sup> Knudsen (1967: 64) does concede that German CO-REF PRON may have aided the progress of the Norwegian construction; he also notes an indirect influence from literary German, via written Danish.

<sup>52</sup> Fiva (1985:42) argues that possessive *s* in Norwegian has arisen as a variant of *sin*, but this seems implausible (see discussion of similar arguments with respect to English in section 7.1).

- (67) a. samferdselsminister Kjell Opseth sin tur. (Oslo: AV/BT96/01)  
*communication minister Kjell Opseth PRON turn*  
 ‘the turn of the minister for communication Kjell Opseth’
- b. NRK sitt syn (Oslo: AV/BT95/02)  
*NRK PRON view*  
 ‘NRK’s view’
- c. internettet sin oppbygging og virkemåte<sup>53</sup>  
*internet.DEF PRON construction and operation*  
 ‘the construction and operation of the internet’

### 8.3.3 PREP

All MSc languages have a PREP construction, but none of them has a dedicated preposition. Instead a range of prepositions are used, depending on the nature of the possessive relationship. Swedish examples of different prepositions being used with phrases that translate into English with *of* were given in (7b)–(7d), though none of these involve core possession. In fact, in standard Swedish, there is no PREP alternative when core possession is involved, nor can it be used when the possessor functions as the subject of an action nominal, see (68).<sup>54</sup>

- (68) a. min sisters dator | \*datorn till/åt/av min syster  
*my sister.POSS computer computer.DEF to/at/of my sister*  
 ‘my sister’s computer’
- b. pojkarnas fnissande | \*fnissandet till/åt/av pojkarna  
*boys.DEF.POSS giggling giggling.DEF to/at/of boys.DEF*  
 ‘the boys’ giggling’

Norwegian, on the other hand, though it can use a range of prepositions for different types of relations as in (69), it can also use a PREP construction with core possession, as in (70). The preposition *til* is in general use, but some varieties use *åt*.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.hit.no/nxcnor/content/view/brief/21816> [accessed 28.10.09]

<sup>54</sup> Many Swedish dialects will use a prepositional construction with *till* or *åt* for core possession, for an excellent overview, see Dahl (2007:179–83). Somewhat paradoxically, with the head noun *ägare* ‘owner’, which would seem to capture core possession, a PREP construction can be used: *hundens ägare / ägaren till/av hunden*.



- (69) a. tittelen på boka hans (Oslo: AV/BT95/04)  
*title on book.DEF his*  
 ‘the title of his book’
- b. begynnelsen av sesongen (Oslo:AV/Ad96/01)  
*beginning.DEF of season.DEF*  
 ‘the beginning of the season’
- (70) a. bilen til sin eks-samboer (Oslo: AV/Ad96/01, *Bokmål*)  
*car.DEF to his ex-partner*  
 ‘his ex-partner’s car’
- b. huset åt Far min (Oslo: AV/BT9X/01, *Nynorsk*)  
*house.DEF at father my*  
 ‘my father’s house’

There is then a difference between the Scandinavian languages in that Norwegian has developed a grammaticalised preposition for possession, but it cannot be used as widely as English *of*, German *von* or Dutch *van*. Swedish, on the other hand, does not have a grammaticalised possessive preposition. It has PREP constructions only when individual prepositions have developed meanings which overlap with those expressed by the possessive preposition in other Germanic languages.

## 9 CONCLUSIONS

In Proto-Germanic (PGmc), GEN was the main expression of possession and this was still true for the individual ancestors of the languages we have considered here. In these languages, GEN formed part of a cases system involving at least three other cases. German and Icelandic have essentially preserved this case system, as has Faroese to a lesser extent. English, Dutch and the Mainland Scandinavian languages can be said to have lost their case systems.

With the difficulties associated with defining when GEN is lost in mind (see section 2.2), we can say that in all languages we have considered, the demise of GEN has coincided in time roughly with the development of some alternative expression of possession. For instance, in English, the use of the genitive is clearly in decline by the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the use of *of* to express possession starts in the 12<sup>th</sup> to be strengthened in

the 13<sup>th</sup>, and a form which we can refer to as POSS-S starts to appear in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Fries, 1940). It may be tempting to link the two developments causally and analyse it as the demise of the case system, or of GEN specifically, having led to the rise of alternative expressions. Alternatively, a “push” rather than “pull” chain can be assumed, where the rise of the new expressions of possessive forced GEN out. The latter option may appear less plausible given the general demise of the case system. However, as the data presented so far have shown, the situation is too complex for a simple causal relationship to be established. Though the early stages of the individual languages were quite similar with respect to GEN, its use and its role within a case system, there is a lot of variation between the languages as to which forms can be used to express possession in the modern varieties. If we say that it was the decline of the case system in Dutch which caused the COREF PRON to develop, then we need to explain why German also developed COREF PRON even though there had not been a similar reduction in the case system. In this section we will look more closely at the connections between the different constructions and their development.

The data presented so far is summarised in Table 1. A blank cell indicates fully productive use of a form, dark shaded its absence and the shade in between some limited degrees of use. We have entered Faroese *sa* under COREF PRON here because of the historical origin we assume it to have (cf Harries, 2008), but as we saw in section 8.2.2.3, it shares properties with other construction types.

	Case system	GEN	POSS-S	PREP	COREF PRON
German	4			<i>von</i>	
Dutch				<i>van</i>	
Afrikaans				<i>van</i>	
English				<i>of</i>	
Icelandic	4			<i>á / í</i>	
Faroese	3/4			<i>hjá</i>	<i>sa</i>
Norwegian				multiple	REFL
Swedish/Danish				multiple	

Table 1: Distribution of expression of possession in some modern Germanic languages

Table 1 illustrates clearly that the present-day systems are very varied; no one system involves the same forms as another. This is true even though the systems were more or less identical a little over one thousand years ago. At the same time, there is a striking family resemblance as far as the alternatives are concerned, PREP is used in all the languages and POSS-S and COREF PRON in at least three of the languages.

The issue of whether Proto-Indo-European had a category that we would describe as ‘preposition’ is still a matter of debate, but it is generally agreed that such a category had developed in PGmc (see for example Ringe, 2006:64–5, 295). Whether there was a PREP construction that could express possession is less clear. We have seen that the extent to which individual Germanic languages have a preposition which has grammaticalised as a possessive marker varies, if it does have one, there is variation as to which preposition is used. This variation may be taken as evidence that PREP constructions to express possession developed once the individual languages had separated. The thoroughly grammaticalised prepositions of English, Dutch and German — *of*, *van* and *von* — all have the same original meaning; ‘away from’. In the Romance languages, the preposition used in the PREP construction derives from the Latin *de* (French *de*, Italian *di*, Spanish *de*, etc), which had the similar meaning ‘down, away from’.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the issue of whether the development of *of* to mark possession in English was the result of influence from French, where the preposition *de* had replaced the Latin genitive as an expression of possession, is still a matter of debate (Altenberg, 1982:14, Fischer, 1992:226, Nielsen, 2005:79). It is true that the use of *of* with core possession only developed in Middle English, but this could have been an internal development. Other related non-locational meanings were associated with *of* in Old English and as we have seen in Swedish, the grammaticalisation of PREP may develop last for core possession (cf section 8.3.3). In the Scandinavian languages, the original source of the preposition used for possession is ‘movement towards’, *til*, or ‘in the vicinity of’, *á/at/åt*.

The other two alternatives POSS-S and COREF PRON appear to be more recent developments than PREP. These constructions did not exist in PGmc and hence are not directly due to a shared historical background; POSS-S and COREF PRON developed independently in the languages we have considered. It might possibly be argued that

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<sup>55</sup> We are grateful to Nigel Vincent for pointing this out to us.

each construction arose only once and that it spread through contact to the other languages. However, apart from the possible spread of COREF PRON from OLG to Norwegian as discussed in 8.3.2, there is no evidence that it was contact which led to these development of the constructions.

Three of the languages can be said to have maintained a case system as discussed above. Of these, Icelandic has fully productive use of GEN to express possession. German has kept a four case system, but the role of GEN in expressing possession is somewhat restricted and a POSS-S construction also exists, along with a number of other ways of expressing possession. In Faroese, the use of GEN is very limited, with PREP being the main expression of possession and a relatively recent alternative, the *sa* construction, appearing to be spreading through the system.

Ignoring Afrikaans for the moment, since it is a development from 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch, all languages except Icelandic and Faroese have developed a POSS-S construction from GEN. However, in German and Dutch, the POSS-S construction did not develop to become a standard way of expressing possession. In these two languages, COREF PRON appears instead to be the main alternative to PREP (though in German only in spoken language), whereas those languages which either use GEN or POSS-S productively do not use COREF PRON to any great extent. The exception is Norwegian, which uses POSS-S as well as COREF PRON as productive alternatives to PREP.

When we contrast productive use with limited use here, there are different ways in which a form is limited. For instance, in German, GEN is quite unrestricted when it comes to the possessive relationship it can express or the type of possessor it permits, but it is generally limited to written and formal registers. COREF PRON, on the other hand, is considered to be confined to informal and spoken German. In Dutch, on the other hand, though we have found GEN to be used slightly more productively than standard descriptions assume, it is mainly limited to certain construction types. There are also certain structural restrictions, where a construction which is unexpected given semantic factors is dispreferred for instance because there would otherwise be repetition, as in (71a), where (33b) — repeated here as (71b) — is preferred. We also saw in (48c) that structural factors, such as postmodification of the possessor, can make speakers choose a PREP construction where POSS-S would be expected because

of animacy in English. Similarly, in Norwegian, COREF PRON is preferred when the possessor is sibilant final, as in (71c) (compare this with the English example in (43)).

- (71) b. die man se naam    wie se    ouderdom    rondom 30 geskat word  
*the man PRON name REL PRON age            about 30 estimated become*
- a. die naam    van die man, wie se    ouderdom    rondom 30 geskat  
 word<sup>56</sup>  
*the name    of    the man REL PRON age            about 30 estimated  
 become*  
 ‘the name of the man, whose age was estimated at about 30’
- c. i sine            kommentarer til lærer    Gunnars            kommentarer  
*in POSS.REFL comments    to teacher Gunnar.POSS comments*
- til elev Frøydis sin            tekst skriver hun ...  
*to pupil Frøydis POSS.REFL text writes she*  
 ‘in her comments on the teacher Gunnar’s comments on the pupil  
 Frøydis’ text she writes ...’ (naturally occurring example cited in  
 Faarlund et al., 1997:258)

Here, we will focus on semantic restrictions on the different expressions of possession, a somewhat simplified representation of which is provided in Table 2. A shaded field indicates that the construction is not used. Stylistic or geographical restrictions are not indicated here.

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<sup>56</sup> <http://www.dieburger.com/Stories/News/19.0.1178102931.aspx> [accessed 14.1.09].

	GEN	POSS-S	COREF PRON	PREP
German	unrestricted	names, unmodified kinship terms <sup>57</sup> , titles	highly animate noun phrases	unrestricted
Dutch	mainly certain construction types	names, kinship terms, titles	highly animate noun phrases	unrestricted
Afrikaans			unrestricted	unrestricted
English		animate noun phrases, spreading into inanimates		unrestricted
Icelandic	unrestricted			unrestricted
Faroese	unrestricted		names, kinship terms	unrestricted
Norwegian		unrestricted	unrestricted	unrestricted
Swedish/Danish		unrestricted		not core possession

Table 2: Semantic restrictions on different types of constructions expressing possession

In the languages which still use GEN, it is largely unrestricted semantically, as it was in PGmc. It may appear surprising then that in German and Dutch there are restrictions on the use of POSS-S, even though this construction developed from GEN. The fact that these restrictions can be described in terms of high animacy concepts is also striking given that the constraints on COREF PRON are also specified in terms of animacy. In Early Modern English, POSS-S was restricted to animate nouns (Rosenbach et al., 2000), and in Present Day English though the use of POSS-S has spread to inanimate possessors, animacy is still the major determining factor in the choice between *'s* and *of* (e.g. Rosenbach, 2002). The development of POSS-S and COREF PRON in Dutch and German occurred independently in the two languages, so that it is not obvious why the constraints between them should be so similar in nature. It may be argued that core possession is associated with more animate referents, so that if POSS-S and COREF PRON initially represented core possession, it is natural that

<sup>57</sup> German, unlike Dutch, uses POSS-S productively only with one word kinship terms: *Vaters Auto* 'father's car' versus *?\*mein Vaters Auto* 'my father's car'. We will return to this point.

they should be more closely associated with animate possessors. With respect to POSS-S, this is not the case, since already in the early stages of the individual languages, GEN was used for non-core possession, such as expressions of time and partitives. Furthermore, though the two restrictions on POSS-S and COREF PRON in German and Dutch places them high on the animacy hierarchy, they are different in nature. ‘Names, (unmodified) kinship terms and titles’ are expressed by morpho-syntactically simple units, whereas ‘highly animate noun phrases’ does not define the element with respect to degree of complexity. We will argue therefore that the restrictions on POSS-S and COREF PRON, respectively, in German and Dutch have different motivations.

POSS-S came about through two parallel developments: the spread of one form, *-s*, from one class of noun to other classes — from certain masculine and neuter nouns to feminine ones — and through a change from agreement to once-only marking. An ambiguous environment will often give rise to change or be a vehicle for the spread of a new form. With respect to agreement versus once-only marking, one-word noun phrases would be ambiguous. Names, kinship terms and titles are all examples of such phrases, and it is not strange then that POSS-S spreads through such constructions first. In Present Day German, POSS-S is only in general use with kinship terms if they are unmodified. However, a change can be seen in Present Day German, where the GEN *-s* of masculine nouns is starting to be used on feminine possessors which consist of a proper noun. Note that the order *possessum < possessor* indicates that this is GEN and not POSS-S.

- (72) a. mit Blick auf die China-Politik Merkels und ihre Einladung  
*with view on the China-policy Merkel.GEN and her invitation*

des Dalai Lama ins Kanzleramt im letzten Jahr<sup>58</sup>  
*the.GEN Dalai Lama in.the Chancellery in last year*

‘with reference to Merkel’s China policy and her invitation of the  
 Dalai Lama to the Chancellery in the last year’

- b. Besonders in diesen etwas ruhigeren Titeln  
*especially in these somewhat more peaceful titles*

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<sup>58</sup> <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/international/China:art123.2516050> [accessed 28.10.09]

überzeugte der liebliche Gesang Judiths.<sup>59</sup>  
*convinced the lovey singing Judith.GEN*  
 ‘Judith’s lovely singing was convincing especially in these somewhat  
 more peaceful songs.’

If initially POSS-S was mainly used with highly animate referents expressed by one word, then the widening to animate referents more generally is a natural one. In the Mainland Scandinavian languages, there has been a further loosening of the semantic restriction beyond animacy. We can then see the three types of languages as having reached different stages of generalisation of POSS-S: German/Dutch: structurally simple animates – English: animates with some spread into inanimate – Mainland Scandinavian: unrestricted. There is evidence that in very colloquial German, the use of the POSS-S construction is spreading beyond the environments described in the literature. In “chat room German”, we can find constructions such as those in (73), in which a two-word possessor precedes the possessum and is marked only once by –s. Both properties identify them as different from GEN constructions. As these examples show, they can also be used with feminine nouns. The standard German GEN form of the possessors would be *meines Bruders* and *meiner Schwester*, respectively, and both would naturally be placed after the possessum.<sup>60</sup> This development could then be seen as the early stages of a change that English and MSc had already undergone.

- (73) a. *mein bruders rechner ist so verstellt*  
*my brother.POSS computer is so altered*  
 ‘my brother’s computer has been changed so much.’
- b. *Meine schwesters Freund hat bald geburtstag*  
*my sister.POSS friend has soon birthday*  
 ‘It is soon my sister’s friend’s birthday.’

The COREF PRON construction in German and Dutch is limited to animate referents, whether they be expressed by a name, a title or a fully modified noun phrase. One account for the development of the COREF PRON possessive argues that it has developed through reanalysis from sentential dative constructions such as those in

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.amboss-mag.de/konzerte/konzber/03/wirindhelden.html> [accessed 24.11.09]

<sup>60</sup> It is interesting that a masculine GEN possessor can marginally occur before the possessum (*?meines Bruders rechner*), whereas a feminine one cannot (*\*meiner Schwester Freund*). It may be that it is the presence of –s, which is ambiguous between GEN and POSS-S that makes the difference.



(74) (see particularly Burridge (1995) for details of the development, but also van Bree (1996:163) and Draye (1996:166)).

(74)     Dat   suuert   hem    sun   hoeft. (Burridge 1995: 3)  
          *that   cleans   he.DAT   his   head*  
          ‘That cleans his brain.’

Burridge (1995) refers to this as ‘the dative of involvement’ and the animacy restriction is then due to the fact that only humans and highly animate creatures could show involvement of this kind. This would explain why the dative possessive is restricted to animate possessors. This account assumes that the use of this type of sentential datives predates the use of COREF PRON and this is not clear. Hendriks (2002, To appear) shows that animacy was not an absolute constraint on these constructions, but there are early examples of inanimate possessors. For Dutch, there is evidence of there being a constructive specific dative case in the possessive construction, but rather the case required by the syntactic function of the phrase is used. Furthermore, she also provides examples of COREF PRON which predate the data used by Burridge by quite a long way.

The use of the dative to mark possession is not uncommon typologically; Heine & Kuteva (2002:103–4) give numerous examples. The connection between the semantic role recipient/benefactive and that of possessor makes a development from a marker of the former relationship to the latter quite plausible. Heine (1997:59–61) refers to this as the Goal Schema and points out that even though it is quite a rare source of attributive possession typologically, it is common in the Germanic languages.<sup>61</sup> We saw in section 7.1 that a dative possessive construction without a pronoun was used in Old English. Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2003b:683–4) gives examples from a northern Swedish dialect in which dative is used for the possessor without the presence of a pronoun, as in (75a). Norwegian and Swedish can use the preposition used for recipient/benefactive also for possessive constructions, as in (75b) (Faarlund, Lie & Vannebo (1997:443), also mentioned by Heine (1997:147)).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Heine uses ‘attributive’ to contrast with predicative, which is the main focus of his study, rather than to just refer to prenominal possessors.

<sup>62</sup> We have simplified the glossing used by Koptjevskaja-Tamm to fit in with the level of detail provided in this paper.

- (75) a. bo:ka        prestum  
*book.DEF priest.DEF.DAT*  
 ‘the priest’s book’
- b. halsbåndet til Fido  
*collar to Fido*  
 ‘Fido’s collar’

This means that the development of dative marking for the possessor in COREF PRON need not rely on the specific construction exemplified in (74), it is due to the semantic relation between recipient and owner. The connection to highly animate referents remains, since Recipient/Benefactive is a role filled mainly by humans.

If COREF PRON is assumed not to have developed by reanalysis of the sentential dative argument in constructions such as (74), how could the presence of the pronoun be accounted for? One hypothesis would be that it is a resumptive pronoun, there to replace a possessor that has been fronted for emphasis. This would be similar in nature to clausal constructions such as the one exemplified in (76a). In fact, there is evidence that something similar may be available to speakers of languages which do not have a productive COREF PRON construction. Examples from English and Swedish are provided in (76b-c).

- (76) a. My dad, he was a good cook.
- b. Jane Mansfield, her bust was forty three inches (BNC KCU 9352)
- c. killen som jobbar med min mamma, hans hund  
*boy REL works with my mum his dog*  
 ‘the guy who works with my mother, his dog’

If this were the way in which COREF PRON has developed, it could play a role in accounting for the restriction to animate referents, since focused or topicalised phrases tend to be animate. Hendriks (2002) shows that already in the early stages of Dutch, there were examples of COREF PRON being used with inanimate possessors. Since this analysis would only predict the preference for animacy to be a strong tendency, it may be considered more plausible than the direct connection with the sentential dative that Burridge (1995) posits.

We are then not in position to understand fully the historical development of COREF PRON, but it has been motivated by factors quite different from those which impacted on the development of POSS-S. The differences in restrictions on the possessors between POSS-S and COREF PRON can be derived from their distinct historical paths: in the case of POSS-S it has come about partly from structural factors, whereas the restriction on COREF PRON is purely semantic. As can be expected, the restrictions derived from the historical origin of the construction have loosened over time in some languages, so that there are no semantic restrictions on the possessor in POSS-S constructions in Swedish, and the use of COREF PRON in Afrikaans has spread to all kinds of possessors.

A striking property of all the languages represented in Table 2 is that there are at least two ways of expressing possession in each language, one of them being PREP. For all languages, PREP is more or less unrestricted but tends to be used more frequently for those possessors ruled out by the expression with restricted use. The only exception is Swedish and Danish, where PREP cannot be used for core possession. One way in which the different expressions of possession vary is in the order between possessor and possessum. In PGmc, possession was expressed exclusively by GEN, and the order between the possessor and the possessum is assumed to have been relatively free. As discussed in section 3, the evidence in favour of possessor<possessum order being unmarked in PGMC is not unambiguous. The order between possessor and possessum in the modern varieties and their individual predecessors is represented in Table 3.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The information available about the order in the early stages of the language is rarely based on quantitative studies of different orders and their correlation to marked environments.

	GEN		POSS-S	COREF PRON	PREP
	Early stage of language				
German	OR<UM	UM < OR	OR < UM	OR < UM	UM < OR
Dutch	both orders	UM < OR	OR < UM	OR < UM	UM < OR
Afrikaans	as for Dutch			OR < UM	UM < OR
English	both, with OR<UM becoming dominant		OR < UM		UM < OR
Icelandic	UM < OR	UM < OR unmarked, OR < UM marked			UM < OR
Faroese		OR < UM unmarked, UM < OR marked		OR < UM	UM < OR
Norwegian	both orders <sup>64</sup>		OR < UM	OR < UM	UM < OR
Swedish/Danish	both orders <sup>64</sup>		OR < UM		UM < OR

Table 3: The order between possessor and possessum across languages and construction types

Table 3 shows that the more recently developed constructions display firmer word order than the original genitive, and that when GEN occurs within a reasonably productive case system, it displays freer word order. This is consistent with a general reduction in freedom of word order which the languages have undergone. Table 3 also shows that in all languages but Icelandic, the different constructions vary with respect to the order between possessor and possessum. PREP has possessum < possessor order, and there is at least one other construction type which permits possessor < possessum. In Icelandic, the possessor<possessum is a marked possibility with GEN, indicating emphasis on the possessor (e.g. Sigurðsson, 2006).

<sup>64</sup> Around the 13<sup>th</sup> century, while still a GEN construction, the order becomes less flexibly OR<UM.

When there is some degree of freedom in word order, information structural considerations are known to influence the outcome. This is particularly clear with the first position in verb second languages such as the Germanic ones, but it has been shown that information structural notions can also be used to account for other variation at the clausal level (see for instance Cook, 2001 on German, Börjars et al., 2003 on Swedish). Large-scale studies of the choice between POSS-S (OR<UM) and PREP (UM<OR) in English (Rosenbach, 2002, Hinrichs and Szmrecsanyi, 2007) show that the topicality of the possessor influences the choice, so that POSS-S tends to be used more frequently when the possessor is topical, in line with tendencies to have given information before new. Teleman, Hellberg & Andersson (1999:34–5) also state that prominence influences the choice between POSS-S and PREP in Swedish: the possessor is prominent in POSS-S but not in PREP. We would speculate that this has been a tendency also in the earlier forms of the languages. It has been argued that both in Old English and in Old Norse, the UM<OR order was more common with inanimate possessors (Mustanoja, 1960–7 and, Faarlund, 2002:729, respectively). This may then be linked to the fact that inanimate referents are less likely to be topical.

Another factor which correlates with order is definiteness. When the possessor is prenominal, it tends to exclude the presence of a determiner associated with the possessum in Germanic. Indeed, in many analyses, the possessor, or the actual GEN or POSS-S marker, is assumed to occupy the same unique position as a determiner (for a general discussion, see Lyons (1999:130–4), for a specific analysis of POSS-S and COREF PRON, see Weerman & de Wit (1999:1171)). A prenominal possessor also normally gives rise to a definite interpretation (for counter-examples, with an indefinite interpretation, see Koptjevskaja-Tamm, 2003a). Contrasting examples of POSS-S vs PREP in English can be found in (77), of POSS-S versus GEN in German in (78) and of COREF PRON versus PREP in Dutch in (79).

(77) a. that author's books

b. a book / the book of the author you came to see<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Compare the use *a book of Oscar's* referred to as the 'post-genitive' (Quirk et al 1985:1283–4) or the 'oblique genitive' (Payne & Huddleston 468–9, 478).

- (78) a. Vaters      Buch  
*father.POSS book*  
 ‘the father’s book’
- b. das Buch / ein Buch    des      Vaters  
*the book    a book    the.GEN father.GEN*  
 ‘the father’s book / a book of the father’
- (79) a. het meisje    d’r    boek  
*the girl      PRON book*  
 ‘the girl’s book’
- b. het boek / een boek    van    het meisje  
*the book    a book    of    the girl*

Since in all the languages, PREP permits both the definite and indefinite interpretation, this cannot, however, be the motivation for the existence of the prenominal genitives.

Those languages which have developed a productive use of POSS-S — that is English and the Mainland Scandinavian languages — all have some restrictions on the use of POSS-S when the possessor involves postmodification.<sup>66</sup> Instead, some alternative construction is used, such a PREP or SPLIT-GEN. Still, the POSS-S element in all these languages is standardly described as a right edge element, a clitic or a phrasal affix. It seems to us that the data indicate that speakers are reluctant to attach POSS-S to the right edge if this does not also coincide with the head. Historically, POSS-S developed from one of the exponents of GEN, which was an affix attaching to the head noun. We then assume that though the distribution of *s* has undoubtedly changed over time, some remnant of head placement appears to remain. Payne (2009) describes this as a “ghost feature” on the head. Historically, it can be thought of in terms of ‘persistence’ in grammaticalisation as discussed by Hopper (1991) (for further data of the distribution in English and how to analyse it, see Scott et al (2007)).

In this paper, we hope to have shown how a detailed comparison of some feature in closely related languages can throw light of the diachronic development of the systems of individual languages. Though we have not been able to explain exactly what properties of the individual languages led to their current system of expression of possession, we have showed that simple causal connections cannot be made since languages with very similar properties develop different systems.

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<sup>66</sup> Languages like Dutch and German, with a less productive use of the construction do not generally allow it to occur with postmodification either, but this need not be a structural constraint as mentioned in sections 4.2.2 and 5.2.1.

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### **Appendix - Primary references**

Examples from older periods of the languages investigated are generally taken from the literature. Contemporary examples are drawn partly from the web, in which case the source is indicated in a footnote at the relevant point in the paper, occasionally from the literature, and partly from the corpora listed below. The orthography of the corpora is preserved throughout the investigation.

- BNC (British National Corpus): ca. 100 million tokens of modern English (90% written, 10% transcribed speech)
- CGN (Corpus Gesproken Nederlands): ca. 9 million tokens of transcribed spoken contemporary Dutch (Netherlands and Belgium)
- FTS (Färöisk TextSamling)
- GSLC (Gothenburg Spoken Language Corpus): ca. 1.4 million tokens of transcribed spoken contemporary Swedish
- INL 38 mil corpus (INL 38 Miljoen Woorden Krantencorpus 1996): ca. 38 million tokens of written Dutch (including journalistic and legal texts) from the early 19<sup>th</sup> - late 20<sup>th</sup> century
- KorpusDK: ca. 56 million tokens of written contemporary Danish
- Oslo (Oslo-korpuset av taggedde norske tekster): ca. 18.3 million tokens of written Bokmål and ca. 3.8 million tokens of written Nynorsk (20<sup>th</sup> century)
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