1

Variation in the NP/DP in Old English: Determiner and Possessive Combinations

CYNTHIA L. ALLEN

1.1 Introduction

This paper\(^1\) investigates the variation in the position of determiners and possessives in Old English (OE) illustrated in (1) and (2):\(^2\)

(1) a. Will ye that I you give this(MAS) your(MAS) king
   b. on þære his gebyrde
   ‘Do you wish me to give you your king/this king of yours?’
   Vercelli L.135
   in that(FDS) his birth(FDS)
   ‘in his birth’ Blickling 167.3

(2) a. & heo is þin seo clæreste fæmne
   and she is thy(FNS) the(FNS) cleanest virgin
   ‘and she is your purest virgin’ Blickling 157.2

\(^1\) The research reported in this paper was partially funded by Australian Research Council Discovery Grant DP0348153.

\(^2\) I use the following symbols, in the order gender, case, number: M=masculine, F=feminine, N=neuter; N=nominative, A=accusative, G=genitive, D=dativive. It should be noted that the grammatical features may not be uniquely identified by the suffix as it is glossed, in which case I have glossed them as appropriate for the syntactic context.

Architectures, Rules, and Preferences: Variations on Themes by Joan Bresnan.
Annie Zaenen, Jane Simpson, Tracy Holloway King,
Jane Grimshaw, Joan Maling, and Chris Manning, (eds.).
Copyright © 2007, CSLI Publications.
b. pa cwæð he eft to his þam leoðan þegna
then said He after to his the(MDS) dear(MDS) thane(MDS)
'He [Christ] then said to his dear thane [John]

Vercelli 1.231

In the Det(erniner) Poss(esseive) construction of (1), the determiner precedes the possessive, while in the Poss Det construction of (2), the order is reversed.3

The Det Poss construction is a well-known feature of earlier English, but non-linguist scholars and linguists alike generally4 do not differentiate this construction from the Poss Det construction. The existence of both constructions has usually been attributed to the freer word order of OE, with the two orders treated as variants of the same construction; for example Batesly (1980: 4) gives examples of both Det Poss and Poss Det to illustrate ‘the idiom combining the possessive and demonstrative.’ Generative linguists who have offered an analysis of Det Poss such as Haegemann and Guérin (1999: 400-1) and Denske (2001: 190-7), have not usually appeared to be aware of the existence of the Poss Det possibility in OE; an exception is Yoon (2002), whose analysis, however, does not account for the two important characteristics of the Poss Det construction mentioned below.

The general neglect of the Poss Det construction by linguists is particularly surprising given that it is by far the more frequently occurring of the two constructions and is indisputably native, since it occurs in all types of OE texts, including native poetry, while the Det Poss construction is pretty much restricted to translations from Latin (a language which allowed demonstratives and possessives to modify the same N). It is probable that linguists’ lack of familiarity with this construction is due to the fact that it is strictly an OE construction, which disappears from all Middle English (ME) texts except some Early ME copies of Early Modern English under Latin influence, making linguists generally more aware of it. I will therefore focus on the Poss Det construction in this paper, offering an LFG analysis and also presenting hitherto undiscovered facts which any analysis must take into account.

3 The term ‘possessive’ in this paper refers only to pronominal possessives, not to genitives in general.

4 Some scholars working within a traditional framework such as Mitchell (1972) makes a careful distinction between the two constructions, but their concern is essentially to catalogue the patterns which are found, and they do not attempt

1.2 Morphology and Syntax of Possessives and Determiners in OE

1.2.1 Possessives: Morphology

The first and second person possessives differed from the third person possessives in OE in their morphology, but not in their syntax. In the first and second persons, the genitive case of the pronoun was used as a base for further inflection; these possessives agreed with the N they modified, as in (3), where min agrees with the neuter accusative singular lif, and minum agrees with the neuter dative plural sceapum:

3) And ic sylle min agen lif for minum sceapum
And I give my(NAS) own(NAS) life-NAS for my-NDF sheep(NDF)
And I give up my own life for my sheep’ ECHI XVII. 9

The suffixes of these possessives follow the ‘strong’ adjective declension.5 In contrast, the third person possessives (both singular and plural) did not agree with their heads:

4) He huht mid his mihte heofona
He holds with his might(PDS) heavens
‘He holds up the heavens with his strength’ ECHI 19

In this example, the indeclinable his does not agree with the dative feminine mihte. The same lack of inflection is found when the third person possessives co-occur with a determiner, as in (1b) and (2b). The third person possessives are identical in form to the genitive case of the pronoun, and for this reason the possessive forms are traditionally regarded as belonging to distinct word classes of (third person) ‘pronouns’ and (first and second person) ‘possession adjectives’.6

However, all these forms share the same syntactic distribution. This situation is easily captured in LFG by the assumption that although all the possessive forms belonged to the same syntactic category, the first and second person forms were equipped in the lexicon with information that they were the modifiers of something with particular grammatical features. (See Section 3).

5 The term ‘possessive’ in this paper refers only to pronominal possessives, not to genitives in general.

6 Some scholars working within a traditional framework such as Mitchell (1972) make a careful distinction between the two constructions, but their concern is essentially to catalogue the patterns which are found, and they do not attempt

OE inherited the Proto-Germanic strong/weak distinction in adjective declensions. Roughly, the strong declension of adjectives was used when an adjective was not preceded by a possessive, genitive NP, or definite determiner, and the weak declension was used when the adjective followed such an element.

Haegemann and Guérin’s (1999: 461) statement that ‘the Old English possessive pronoun agreed with the head noun’ is therefore not accurate for the third person forms, and their proposed analysis incorrectly suggests that the syntax of the third person possessives should be different from that of the other persons, as pointed out by Yoon (2002: 213).
Possessive inflection did not change in the Det Poss construction, e.g. *lysne cowerne cyning* in (1a) has the distinctive strong accusative masculine singular *-ne* suffix on both the determiner and the possessive. This makes the inflecting possessives different from adjectives, which normally had a weak inflection when they followed a definite determiner. Both the Det Poss and the Poss Det construction are found with both the non-agreeing third person possessive and the agreeing possessives. If the determiner were found only co-occurring with the third person possessives, we might suppose that the purpose of the determiner was to supply the possessive with case inflection, but this cannot be.

1.2.2 Determiners: forms and meanings

OE had two demonstratives, *se* and *hes*. While *hes* is straightforwardly translated as the demonstrative THIS in Modern English, *se* is more complicated. Both the Modern English definite article THE and the demonstrative THAT derive from *se*. This determiner is sometimes explicitly contrasted with the proximal demonstrative in OE stage, but already at this stage, it is sometimes best translated as ‘the’, and very often either ‘that’ or ‘the’ would serve as a good translation. Both determiners inflected to agree with their N head.

1.2.3 Distribution of Possessives and Determiners

Demske (2001: 190-7) presents five arguments that possessives were adjectives in OE. She assumes that possessives were reanalyzed as part of the determiner system in Early Modern English. Space does not allow a refutation of all these arguments, but, it is worth demonstrating that Demskes’s two strongest syntactic arguments are unconvincing.

Demske suggests that possessives were like adjectives in OE in being able to occur in postnominal position. But while both adjectives and possessives are certainly found in postnominal position in OE poetry, postnominal position is not usual for either simple adjectives or simple possessives in OE prose. Postnominal possessives in the prose are essentially restricted to vocatives, e.g. *fader ure*, lit. ‘father our’ in the OE version of the Lord’s prayer. Postnominal adjectives are also found in vocative use, but only when accompanied by a determiner, as in the *Men de laofstan*, ‘dearest people’, lit. ‘people the belovedest’, a phrase of commonly used by OE homilists to address their congreg.

Furthermore, genitive NP/DPs could generally follow their heads in OE.

\[(5) *se forma de jpyssere worulde\]

\[the(MNS) first(MNS) day(MNS) this(PGS) world(PGS)\]

‘the first day of this world’ ECHI VI.150

It is therefore quite possible that the post-head possessives found in poetry and vocatives are best treated as phrasal. At any rate, the facts do not demand an analysis which treats possessives as adjectives. Furthermore, Mitchell (1985: 163) notes that postnominal determiners are also sometimes found in OE poetry, a fact which undermines Demskes’s attempts to show that possessives pattern like adjectives and not like determiners.

The second argument is the existence of the Det Poss construction, where the Poss appears between the determiner and N, the normal position for an adjective. However, such a treatment does not explain the Poss Det construction (which Demskes does not mention), since adjectives did not normally occur before determiners in OE.

A systematic investigation (outlined in the Appendix) of the Poss Det and Det Poss constructions has uncovered two principal facts which must be accounted for. First, either *se* or *hes* may be used in the Det Poss construction, but only *se* is found in the Poss Det construction. Although this restriction is not noted in the few recent works which mention the existence of Poss Det, it appears to be a very solid fact; I have found 250 examples of Poss Det in my investigation, and every one of them has *se*, but of the 129 examples of Det Poss, twenty four have *hes*.

Second, the Poss Det construction has an adjective as an integral component. In all the examples which I found of this construction, there is an adjective, as indicated in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poss Det type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of total Poss Det</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poss Det Adj</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poss Det Adj N</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poss Det N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** 250 100

**Table 1** Occurrence of Poss Det in corpus

The association of Poss Det with adjectives has not gone entirely unnoticed, but because earlier studies have not adequately discriminated between OE texts which are found in manuscripts which are fairly close to the time of composition of the text and ‘OE’ texts which are in fact
copies found in manuscripts from the Middle English period, there has
not been a general recognition of the absolute nature of this restriction
on the Poss Det construction in the OE period. For example, Mitchell
(1985: §105) cautiously says that the construction is ‘rare’ without an
adjective. In fact he notes that he only knows of one such example:

(6) mid his hæm anrewælde
       with his the(MDS) power
  ‘with his power’ Boethius 69.23

It turns out that although this particular example comes from a text
composed in the late ninth century, it in fact is found in a manuscript
which was copied long after the text was composed; Ker (1957: 305)
puts it in the first part of the twelfth century, when the Poss
Det construction was dying out (see Section 5). It is possible that the
sentence may have had an adjective in it earlier which got omitted
in the process of copying at some stage. Another possibility is that
an adjective was no longer obligatory in this construction at this late
stage. At any rate, a single example in a manuscript at such a remove
from the original text cannot be considered a serious counterexample
to an otherwise valid generalization.

As indicated in Table 1, in some instances the adjective in question
is not followed by an overt N:

(7) & his bone neblæstan æfrefrice
       and his the(MAS) nearest(MAS) comforts
  ‘and comforts his neighbor’

This fact is undoubtedly related to the fact that what are traditionally
called ‘substantival adjectives’ such as se blinda ‘the blind man’ were
freely used in OE. A possible approach is to say that in OE, adjectives
generally had an alternate lexical entry which supplied the information
Pred = ‘pro’ for an unexpressed head N.

In contrast to the Poss Det construction, an adjective is not only
optional but infrequent in the Det Poss construction; only 19 of the
130 Det Poss examples in my data have an adjective.

1.3 Proposed Analysis

Before giving an analysis which deals with the facts mentioned above, it
is necessary to provide some basic information on adnominal genitives
in OE. I will use the term ‘genitive’ to refer to NP/DPs with a lexical
head N in the genitive case. As mentioned in the preceding section,
genitives could either precede or follow their heads, depending on vari-
ous factors, including the ‘weight’ of the genitive phrase; see McLagan

(2004) for an investigation of these factors in a volume of homilies of
the late tenth-century. One fact which will be of relevance concerns the
interaction of adjectives and genitives.8

An adjective normally directly preceded the head N (Mitchell 1985:
§172). The adjective could be preceded by another modifier, including

8 Examples like (8) are not at all common; when N is modified by both
an adjective and a genitive phrase, the genitive phrase is more often
in the postnominal position, as in (5). However, examples like (8) occur
too frequently to be considered ungrammatical. In contrast to prasal
possessives, possessives normally (in prose, at least) preceded the head
N even if it was also modified by an adjective. Genitives of single Ns
patterned with the possessives in the respect, as in (9):

(9) on Cristes trôngeæ bærmelodic andanætasæ
       in Criste(MAS) true(FDS) humble(FDS) confession(FDS)
  ‘in the true humble confession of Christ’ Blickling 171.9

As in Modern English, prenominal genitives did not normally co-occur
with a determiner modifying the head. I will assume that prenomi-
nal genitives in OE were Specifiers of DP with a POSS function,9 and
following Bresnan’s (2001: 133–41) discussion of the economy of expres-
sion and extended heads, I assume that the reason why the head D is
not expressed along with the POSS is that its definiteness feature is
redundant. I furthermore assume that these phrases were equipped in
the phrase structure with a constraining equation specifying that they
must have genitive case.

I assume that possessives were determiners already in OE. The treat-
ment of third person possessives is straightforward; they supplied the
genitive case demanded of POSS. I assume that first and second person
possessive forms, along with all other determiners and also adjectives,

8 Space does not allow a thorough discussion of the very common construc-
tion found in (i), referred to as the Low Prenominal Genitive by Crisma (Forthcom-
ing), where the adjective agrees with the head N, rather than with the genitive N:

(i) see aelæase halwæsea stæfæ waæs gylæræ
     the(FDS) implius(FDS) hell-dweller( topical) voice was heard
  ‘the impious voice of the host of Hell was heard’ Blickling 87.3

However, an account which treats these as a sort of compound seems promising.

9 On the POSS function, see Lacatilo (1985) and Bresnan (2001). It is irrelevant
for our purposes here whether possessives and genitives in OE sometimes had the
alternative genitive function which Lacatilo assumes for some of phrases in English.
had lexical entries with statements that they agreed with something in a particular case. For example, the *minum* of (3) would have a lexical entry like (10):\[10\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(10) } \text{min: D} & \quad (\uparrow \text{PRED} = \text{'PRO'}) \\
& \quad (\uparrow \text{NUM}) = \text{SG} \\
& \quad (\uparrow \text{PERS}) = 1 \\
& \quad (\uparrow \text{CASE}) = \text{GEN} \\
\text{um:inf} & \quad ((\text{POSS} \uparrow \text{CASE}) = \text{DAT} \\
& \quad ((\text{POSS} \uparrow \text{NUM}) = \text{PL} \\
\end{align*}
\]

This entry uses Inside-Out Functional Uncertainty (Dalrymple 1993, Halvorsen 1988, Bresnan 2001: 65-8) to enforce agreement of the possesive with the N it modifies. Thus, the possesive itself has genitive case, but it also carries the case of the N. It seems reasonable to assume that in the Det Poss construction the determiner is a phrasal demonstrative in a topic-like position in the left periphery of the DP. A similar construction is found in German as discussed by Plank (1992) and it is likely that essentially the same analysis is appropriate for the German and OE facts. The Poss Det construction is typologically more exotic, and it is this construction on which I will focus here.

For reasons which will shortly become clear, I assume an important difference between demonstratives and articles. Giusti (1997) argues that demonstratives are universally phrasal categories, while articles are heads. We can achieve this effect by assuming that APs is a determiner which has some sort of *PRED*. Thus, it can only occur in the Specifier position, as an adjunct to the NP. Se is similar when it means ‘that’, but is the functional head D, without a *PRED*, in its article use, where it is a co-head with N or A.

The final assumption, which explains the association of Poss Det with adjectives, is that AP could be the complement of a D head. Thus my suggested analysis for the Poss Det of (2a) is (11):

\[
\begin{align*}
(\uparrow \text{PRED}) & = \downarrow \\
(\text{LOCASE}) & = \text{GEN} \\
\text{DP} & \\
 & \downarrow \\
\text{NP} & \\
 & \downarrow \\
\text{D} & \\
\text{AP} & \\
\text{A} & \\
\text{D} & \\
\text{se} & \\
\text{nom} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

This analysis treats the Poss Det construction as having two determiners in one DP, the first in the Specifier of DP and the second taking AP as its complement in the adjunct of NP. As Giusti (1997) notes, it is not unusual cross-linguistically for adjectives (and prepositions) to be accompanied by articles. A common pattern is that both the noun and the adjective have a determiner:

(12) ha-bayit ha-gadol
the-house the-big
‘the big house’ (Hebrew, Giusti 1997 ex. 24a)

(13) afo to ooro to vivlio
this the good the book
‘this good book’ (Greek, Giusti 1997 ex. 41a)

Giusti treats the co-occurrence of an article and an adjective as an instance of a nominal modifier projecting its own extended projection.\[11\] In an LFG analysis, the AP complement of D in (11) serves the same function as this extended projection. This analysis follows the principle proposed in Bresnan (2001: 101) that complements to functional heads

\[11\] Kollakou’s (2005: 25, 83) HPSG analysis of Greek is different in that it treats the definite article as a subcategorization requirement of the head N, rather than a head, but it is similar in that she allows for D to select for ‘nominal’ complements, which include adjectives, in order to account for the ability of determiners to occur freely with adjectives which do not modify an overt head N, such as *ena agliko* ‘an English one'.
must have a feature matrix that is equally marked or more marked than
that of the functional head; since D is [-transitive, -predicative] and
AP is [+predictive], AP may be a complement of D.\textsuperscript{12}

Since no modern Germanic language appears to offer evidence for

determiners in AP, it may seem surprising to assume this possibility for
OE. However, it must also be noted that no modern Germanic language
allows the sequence Poss Det, and since the evidence that this com-
bination existed in OE is incontrovertible, it must simply be assumed
that OE was different in some important way from all modern Ger-
mancic languages. It is of interest in this connection to note that Spa-
er (1979) and Fischer (2000) argue on separate grounds that weak ad-
jectives (the type of adjective found in these constructions) have nominal
characteristics in OE. The nominal characteristics, including the ability
to co-occur with a determiner, are not surprising when we realize that
the weak adjective declension was originally a nominalization (Curze
1910: 441, Prokosch 1960: §38 etc.).

Of most importance is the ability of the analysis to capture the facts.
It explains why the Poss Det construction is limited to \textit{se}. If \textit{he}s
were inserted in D in this construction, it would contribute a second
\textit{Pred} to the DP, which should get its \textit{Pred} only from the adjective. Thus, the
\textit{se} of this construction is the article \textit{se}. There is interesting support for
this analysis from Old Norse, where the Poss Det construction is also
found, although apparently much less commonly. Heusler (1962: §410)
gives a small number of examples of Poss Det Adj in Old Norse, which
differed from OE in already having a definite article \textit{inn}, distinct from the
demonstrative \textit{si} (cognate with \textit{se}). Unfortunately, Heusler was not
concerned with the limitations on this construction; he presents
the examples in a general discussion of prenominal versus postnominal
positioning of possessives. However, it is interesting to note that in all
the examples which Heusler gives of the Poss Det combination, it is the
definite article which is used. There is furthermore always an ad-
jective, as in the OE examples. Barnes (2001: §3.3.5) also notes that it
was common to combine a definite article with a preceding demonstra-
tive in Old Norse when a noun was modified by an adjective, as in \textit{inn
(h)inn blindi maðr}, lit. ‘that the blind man’, but makes no mention of a

demonstrative combining with an article when there was no adjective,
suggesting that the article was due to the presence of an adjective. The
fact that the analysis extends to Old Norse suggests that it is essen-
tially correct, and that already at the OE stage there was a definite
article, albeit indistinguishable in form from the demonstrative.

The analysis extends to examples in which a genitive phrase is fol-
lowed by \textit{se}. An unmodified genitive N (usually a proper N) in this
construction is not rare:

\begin{itemize}
  \item (14) \textit{on Godes þone sōjan þeowdom}
  \textit{in God’s own people}
  \textit{true(=true) service(=service)}
  \textit{true service of God’s Blickling 45.24}
\end{itemize}

Again, simple nouns are similar to possessives, since examples in which
a modified N precedes the determiner are uncommon. However, they
are found in some texts:

\begin{itemize}
  \item (15) \textit{he} sōfer \textit{se} ancenda \textit{sunu}
  \textit{the(father) NGS the(MNS) only-begotten(MNS) son(MNS)}
  ‘the only begotten Son of the Father’ Gregory(C) 261.26
\end{itemize}

It is not difficult to find an explanation for the fact that examples
like (15) are not common. As already noted, the usual position of a
phrasal genitive was after the head N when that N was modified by an
adjective. This means that we would not expect many examples of a
phrasal genitive before a determiner, given our assumption that an ad-
jective was an essential ingredient of the construction. This assumption
is given further support by the nature of the few phrasal genitives which
do co-occur with a following determiner: they all involve an adjective.
Furthermore, the determiner is always \textit{se}, as predicted.

1.4 Typological Status and Prehistory of Poss Det

Although it is not typologically unusual for adjectives to co-occur with
articles, the particular array of facts found in OE seems to be highly
unusual. First, the determiner that accompanies the adjective is op-
tional, making OE quite different from Modern Greek, for example.\textsuperscript{13}
Second, the association of Poss Det order with adjectives has not been
noted in any of the typological literature which I have consulted. It
is not unheard of for a language to have a prenominal construction in
which a possessive precedes a determiner; this is found for example in

\textsuperscript{12}However, allowing D to take AP as its complement violates Toivonen’s (2001: only NP as its complement. Toivonen does not offer any arguments for D to take
requirement, which appears to be motivated mainly by a desire to be as restrictive
as possible, nor does she indicate how the more restrictive stipulations will deal
with constructions such as English gerunds, which Brennan (2001: 291) analyzes as
nominal phrases with verbal complements.

\textsuperscript{13}Barnes (2001: §3.3.5) indicates that it is unusual but not impossible for an
adjective to following immediately after a demonstrative without an intervening
article in Old Norse, suggesting that Old Norse was similar but not identical to
Greek in this respect.
Bulgarian where the determiner in question is a clitic on the first stressed element of NP (Scotton 1984):

(16) moja-ta kniga
    my-the book

Similar facts are found in Macedonian. But the OE construction does not involve an clitic determiner and it furthermore must always have an adjective, unlike the Slavic constructions. Furthermore, the Slavic construction appears to put emphasis on the possessive — my book, not yours (see also Manzelli 1990). This is unlike the OE Poss Det, which seems rather to emphasize the adjective.

In general, any analysis of a dead language which assumes a situation which is not found in any living language must be the subject of skepticism. However, in this instance, the evidence for the association of Poss Det with adjectives in OE is overwhelming because of the large number of examples. It must also be remembered that there is still much that we do not know about the possibilities of the NP/DP universally. It does not appear that the restrictions on the co-occurrence of possessives and determiners is something that typologists have examined very systematically. A language which has a similar construction to the Poss Det construction of OE must have some special characteristics to begin with; it must have possessives which are determiners, rather than adjectives or clitics, and it must allow for determiners to co-occur with adjectives. With such restrictions, we do not expect this sort of Poss Det construction to be at all common.

Furthermore, typologically unusual (but not impossible) constructions can arise when a special set of circumstances combine to bring them about, and it appears that this is what happened with OE. I noted above that weak adjectives started out as nominalizations. I now observe that there is reason to believe that modifiers of N originally had a postnominal position (see Smith 1971). Of particular interest to us here is the fact that the combination Poss + Det + Adj in postnominal position is attested in all the early Germanic languages. Heinrichs (1994) offers examples from all these languages; here, I will present only an illustrative example from Old Saxon and another from OE:

(17) frō min the gōdo
    lord my the good
    'My good Lord' (Old Saxon, Helland 2009)

(18) Mathewes, min se leofa
    Matthew, my the dear
    'Matthew, my beloved...' Blickling 229.30

Heinrichs presents such examples to illustrate articles used as 'linking particles' between nouns and adjectives, and does not differentiate these examples from ones lacking a possessive:

(19) drōhūn the gōdo
    lord the good
    'the good lord' (Old Saxon, Helland 401)

It seems reasonable to assume, as Heinrichs suggests, that there was still a rather nominal feel to these adjectives; a possible translation for (17) might be 'my Lord, the good one.' A plausible interpretation of examples (17) and (18) is, then, that the possessive modifies the noun it follows, and the following Det + Adj forms a phrase in apposition to the N + Poss, so we have [N + Poss] [Det + Adj].

What makes OE different from most other early Germanic languages is that the combination Poss + Det + Adj is found in the prenominal position also. OE is not quite unique in this respect; at least a few examples are also found in Old Norse, as mentioned above, although they are not likely to be very frequent because the postnominal position for possessives was favored in that language, except when the possessive was emphatic (Barnes 2001: §3.9.6, Heuser 1962: §516.) It would seem that what happened in OE, but not most other Germanic languages, was that the combination Poss + Det + Adj survived the transition to prenominal position, with the Poss moving to the normal position for a prenominal possessive.

1.5 Demise of Poss Det

It is plausible that a marked construction will be vulnerable to loss, and so it is perhaps not surprising that the Poss Det construction did not survive. However, generations of language learners did learn it, since it is found in texts spanning two centuries or so. There is some rather equivocal evidence of a decline in frequency of use in the later

---

14I am grateful to Peter Hili for help with the Bulgarian in particular, and to Liljana Minkovska for additional information on Macedonian.

15It is not obvious what determines the use of Poss Det in all instances. However, contrastive. For example, at Blickling 179.1, the homilist uses his `bone mennissan det' 'his human part' when he is making a contrast with Christ's divine part.

16OE texts were not punctuated like Modern English ones, and the comma after Mathues in (18), added by the editor of the text, is not a reliable guide to the syntax. It is possible, however, that in the OE example, postnominal min is part of the postnominal DP.
OE period, but it is difficult to tell the difference between a diachronic
decline here and simple variation in individual taste. What we can say
with some certainty, however, is that the Poss Det construction was
archaic by the end of the twelfth century. After 1100, there are few
original examples (as opposed to examples which are found in copies of
texts of OE composition). It can safely be assumed that the Poss Det
construction was not really part of the language by the middle of the
twelfth century or so, but was copied by scribes in the same way that
phrases of the King James Bible are still used today.

It is unclear at this point what triggered the loss of the Poss Det
construction, which by the analysis proposed here consists of the loss
of the ability for D to select AP complements. The obvious place to
look for a cause is in other changes to the determiner and adjectival
systems. There are several changes which took place in the ME period
in these areas: the emergence of a distinct definite article (possibly
assisted by contact with Scandinavian; see Millar 2000), the weakening
of the strong/weak distinction, and the general loss of the ability of
adjectives to be used ‘substantively’, i.e. without a head noun, except
developments. The problem with seeing any one of these changes as the
changes which were not very well advanced at the time when Poss Det
had apparently vanished as a living construction. The explanation may
simply lie in a gradual lessening of the ‘nouniness’ of the weak adjectives
once the prenominal position became regular for them, perhaps aided
by a lessening of the deictic effect of SE, which could not have had a
PRED in the Poss Det construction by the analysis proposed here but
does appear to have had some role in emphasizing an adjective which
it preceded. More research is needed into the changing characteristics
of adjectives and determiners in ME.

1.6 Conclusion

Lacroix (1995: 78) comments that LFG has so far been mainly focused
on sentence-level phenomena and calls for more work on nominal syn-
thesis. The present study has attempted to illuminate the structure of the
OE stage is an essen-
tial base for work on the later development of the NP/DP in English,
and although I have only examined one very small part of it here, I hope
such things as the interaction between quantifiers and determiners at
the OE stage, as well as a small contribution to our knowledge of how
determiners can evolve. I have focused on the Poss Det construction
in this paper because it is one which has been overlooked for the most
part by generative syntacticians, but one which seems to give some
particularly useful information about the nature of determiners in OE.

It is clear that English was already a highly endocentric language
at the OE stage, despite its case marking system. While there was a
certain amount of freedom in the placement of XPs as well as the place-
ment of complements and specifiers within XPs, OE was essentially a
configurational language, not a lexocentric one, and the variation be-
tween Det Poss and Poss Det order is not due to any general freedom
of placement of the constituents of NP/DP, as has so often been as-
sumed. The Det Poss construction, which is found in many languages,
needs no special explanation, and the Poss Det construction can be at-
tributed to the fact that D could take AP complements. I have argued
that this possibility was the result of the origins of the weak adjectives
in Germanic as nominalizations. While the Poss Det construction is
typologically unusual, its development can be understood in its histori-
cal context. Further research into the question of whether any living
languages has a Poss Det construction which is dependent upon the
presence of an adjective is needed. Further research is also needed into
the reasons for the loss of the ability of D to select for AP complements
in EM.

Appendix: Details of the Investigation

The data used in this paper come primarily from the York-Toronto-
Helsinki parsed corpus of Old English prose (YCOE). I used Cor-
pusSearch (Randall 2000) to find all examples of noun phrases contain-
ing both determiners and possessive pronouns in all the texts of the
YCOE which were assigned a date of xii (beginning of the eleventh
century) or earlier, with two exceptions. First, I excluded coeboech.02
(the translation of both the Consolation of Philosophy) because the
YCOE’s date of a.xm (middle of the tenth century) is only correct
for one of the manuscripts used by the edition which the YCOE used; a
large portion of this text is edited from a twelfth-century manuscript.

Second, I used corgredC.024, which is found in a manuscript of xime.
instead of corgredH.023, which is in a manuscript of s.xi (first half of
the eleventh century). The reason is that the C version is a copy of the
earlier version of Gregory’s Dialogues, while the H version is a copy of a
substantially revised version. The C version is furthermore a rich source
of Det Poss and Poss Det, confirming already strong generalizations.
made on the basis of other texts and not offering any counterexamples to those generalizations.

The YCOS is a corpus of prose, and to find examples of the Det Pos and Poss Det constructions in verse, I have searched the entire verse OE portion of the Helsinki Corpus, compiled by Rissanen and Ilmahainen (1991), for strings which might be used in these constructions.

The factual claims made about Poss Det in the ME period are based on the application of CorpusSearch on the texts designated as 'M' (i.e. from 1150-1250) in the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English 2 (PPCME 2, compiled by Kroch and Taylor 1999), as well as my own reading of some eleventh and twelfth century texts not included in the PPCME 2. Because the focus of the paper is the syntax of Poss Det in OE, I have not provided the details of these ME texts.

References


Apparent Copular Inversion and the Theory of Null Subjects

ALEX ALSINA

Introduction

The study of copular constructions with an NP complement in Catalan and other Romance languages of the null-subject variety reveals an unexpected situation: although, as a rule, the verb always agrees with the subject in these languages, the copular verb sometimes agrees, at least apparently, with an NP that is not the subject, a phenomenon that I refer to as Apparent Copular Inversion (ACopInv). The questions I will address in this paper are:

1. What is the copular verb really agreeing with in ACopInv?
2. Why does ACopInv only occur in languages of the null-subject variety?
3. What distinguishes these languages from non-null-subject languages?

The answers to these questions will be couched in a framework that adopts essential ideas of Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG) and Optimality Theory (OT). The core of the analysis is the claim that null-

---

1 This paper has benefited from comments by Louise McNally, Joana Rosselló and Jane Simpson, which I gratefully acknowledge.
2 I refer to languages that freely allow the subject to be null and interpreted as a pronoun as null-subject languages. The synonymous term subject pro-drop or, simply, pro-drop, languages is also found in the literature. I refer to languages that always require an overt subject as non-null-subject languages.