The Development of Possessive Expressions in the Germanic Languages.

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This paper

- Germanic Possessive -s project (Manchester):
  - Expression of possession in present-day English and Swedish
  - Is possessive -s a clitic, as suggested in much of the literature (e.g. Anderson 2005, Zwicky & Pullum 1983)?
  - Historical development of possessive expressions in the Germanic languages

- This paper

  - The aim of the paper:
    - Follow and compare the development of possessive expressions in the Germanic languages
      - Identify common trends and patterns
      - Focus on neglected/disputed aspects

- This paper

  - Existing research specifically on the development of possessive expressions:
    - English: Allen (2008) – genitives in Old and Middle English, comparison with other Germanic languages; Altenberg (1982); Rosenbach (2002); Rosenbach et al. (2000)
    - Dutch: Weerman & de Wit (1999)
    - Swedish: Börjars (2003); Norde (1997)
    - General: Delsing (1998); also parts of Allen (2008)

- This paper

  - Structure of talk

    1. Areal distribution of possessive expressions
    2. Chronology of possessive expressions
    3. Development of possessive expressions
      - Genitive case ⇒ possessive -s
        - Diachronic development throughout Germanic languages
        - Focus on German and Dutch
      - Typology of possessive -s
        - Focus on a recent development in German
    4. Conclusions
Possessive expressions

I. Genitive Case

German: das Buch des Mannes 'the book the GEN man GEN'

II. Poss-s

Danish: mandens bog 'the man's book'

III. Co-ref Pron ('separated genitive' (Allen 2008))

Norwegian: Stena Line sine overfarter 'Stena Line's crossings'

IV. Prep

Dutch: de auto van mijn compagnon 'my companion's car'

Areal distribution

Variation across space and time

Originally: genitive case found in all Germanic languages

Present-day: possessive expressions unevenly spread throughout Germanic languages
Ancient periods: genitive case

Genitive case

Poss-s

Co-ref pron

Prep

Chronology

- Similar developments at different times:
  - All the languages start off with genitive case marking of possession
  - Development of prepositional possession marking
  - Genitive falls out of use in some languages
  - Development of Poss-s
    - Often connected to decline of genitive/case system (e.g. English, Mainland Scandinavian), but not always (e.g. German)
  - Development of Co-ref pron: from body part expressions with dative? (e.g. Burridge 2003)
Analysis of Poss-s

- Two contrasting views on history of Poss-s (in English):
  - Allen (e.g. 2008 and earlier work): Poss-s < genitive case
  - Janda (1980): Poss-s < Co-ref pron (i.e. “his-genitive”)  
- Cross-linguistically (in the Germanic languages), there seems to be a link between the development of genitive case and the development of Poss-s.
- Our assumption (following Allen): Poss-s developed from genitive case
  - This position seems to cover the related developments throughout the Germanic languages.
Analysis of Poss-s

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Our assumption (following Allen):
Poss-s developed from genitive case

This position seems to cover the related developments throughout the Germanic languages.

Development of possessive expressions

1. Genitive case ⇒ Poss-s
   i. Diachronically and cross-linguistically
   ii. Present-day German
   iii. Present-day Dutch

2. Typology of Poss-s
   i. Comparison of Germanic languages
   ii. Recent development in German

Genitive ⇒ Poss-s: Genitive case

- Defining ‘case system’ is tricky
- Some characteristics of a productive case system (especially relevant to marking of possession):
  - Case marking on N and D (maybe also on an A)
  - Genitive governed by some verbs, prepositions and adjectives (i.e. not only used for possession)
    - Uncertainty about which case to use here may suggest a breakdown of the case system
      (e.g. Di Meola 2004 re. present-day German)
  - More than one genitive marker (e.g. Icelandic)

Genitive ⇒ Poss-s: Poss-s

- How can we identify Poss-s as distinct from genitive case?
  - Only one exponent: -s
  - -s appears on feminine (and plural) possessors (not just masc. and neut. singular)
  - Once-only marking on possessor noun (i.e. no marking on determiners or adjectiv in possessor NP)
  - Marking on right-edge of possessor NP – not necessarily on head (in English and Mainland Scandinavian; not yet in German and Dutch [?])
  - Not governed by verbs, adjectives or prepositions (but cf. Faroese once-only possessive marker)

Genitive ⇒ Poss-s: Genitive in Germanic

- All Germanic languages start off with a case system comprising 4 productive cases
  - nominative, accusative, dative, genitive
  - relics of old cases (e.g. instrumental)

Genitive ⇒ Poss-s: Loss of Genitive

- Number of forms of genitive marker is reduced to just one before once-only marking develops.
- Is this a prerequisite for the development of Poss-s?
- No languages have a once-only possessive construction with more than one marker.
- Icelandic retains an inventory of genitive markers and has no once-only possessive construction.
  - N.B. German has two productive genitive markers, namely -s (masc./neut. sing.) and -Ø (fem. sing./all genders plu.), plus some restricted/unproductive markers, and DOES have Poss-s.
  - However, German -s IS the only productive physically realised genitive ending.
Genitive ⇒ Poss-s: Loss of Genitive
- Deterioration of case system (except Icelandic)
- Number of cases reduced (e.g., German dialects)
- Number of markers of each case reduced: genitive -s in most Germanic languages
- Genitive stops being governed by verbs, prepositions and adjectives

Genitive ⇒ Poss-s: Constituent order
- Order of possessor and possessum in genitive case:
  - Originally the two could appear in either order
  - Order generally firms up as possessum – possessor
    - Icelandic: either order grammatical but possessum stipulately marked
    - German: new possessor – possessum constructions are unusual/marked
  - ?? des Sohnes Hund v. der Hund des Sohnes
    - the.GEN son.GEN dog the dog the.GEN son.GEN
- Poss-s always has possessor – possessum order

Genitive ⇒ Poss-s: General developments
- Typological/historical pattern:
  - Case system dies out; Poss-s develops from genitive case
  - E.g., English, Mainland Scandinavian
  - Icelandic retains case system and has no Poss-s
- Anomalies:
  - Dutch has lost its case system; retains (limited) genitive case AND Poss-s
  - German retains its case system (including genitive): genitive and Poss-s coexist
  - Faroese genitive case unproductive; once-only possession marking is not a development of the genitive

Genitive in German
- Masc./neut. marker -s used with feminine possessors
- This is still genitive case (note order of possessor and possessum)
  - Schröder kritisiert China-Politik Merkels
  - ‘Schröder criticises China policy Merkel.GEN’
  - …dienen die Instrumente als roter Teppich für den Gesang Judiths
  - ‘…serve the instruments as red carpet for the singing Judith.GEN’
- Evidence of a genitive in decline (compare descriptions of older English, Dutch and Mainland Scandinavian)?
  - Cf. 16th/17th century Dutch:
    - de vader des bruid’s ‘the father the.GEN bride.GEN’
    - (Komen 1997: 406)

Genitive in Dutch
- Freely formed present-day genitives:
  - het einde der liberale dominatie
    - ‘the end of liberal domination’
  - de onbekende wereld der fietsverhuurders
    - ‘the unknown world of (the) bicycle leasers’
  - des schrijvers voetsporen
    - ‘the writer’s footsteps’
  - (from INL 38 mil. words corpus)

Genitive in Dutch
- Freely formed present-day genitives:
  - het probleem der overbevolking
    - ‘the problem of overpopulation’
  - de invloed der atmosfeer
    - ‘the influence of the atmosphere’
Genitive in Dutch

- Speaker uncertainty?
- Mismatch between determiner number and possessor number

\[
\text{de mildheid der jaren} \quad \text{(CGN: fn008413)}
\]

'The mildness of the years'

Typology of Poss-s

- Seen diachronically: final stage of development of genitive
  (e.g. in English and Mainland Scandinavian, but not German)
- Possessor-based restrictions vary between languages...

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From an internet chat forum: http://www.med1.de/Forum/Sucht/112158/ [accessed 20.5.09]
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**Recent development in German Poss-s**

- **Mein bruders rechner ist so verstellt**
  - "my brother's computer is so altered"
  - "my brother’s computer has been altered so much"

- **Marking only on head of possessor NP**

- **Order:** possessor = possessum

- **"s marker used with masculine possessors and with feminine possessors...**

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- mein bruders rechner ist so verstellt
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  - "my brother’s computer has been altered so much"

- from there on knew 1, that my teacher's team behind us is
  - "I knew from there on that my teacher's team was behind us"

| Corresponds to development observed in older Swedish and English |
| Marking only on head of possessor NP |
| Order: possessor = possessum |
| "s marker used with masculine possessors and with feminine possessors..."
Conclusions

- From a shared starting point, the Germanic languages have developed their inventory of possessive expressions in different ways and at different rates.
- Nonetheless, many common trends can be observed.
- Cross-linguistically, support for view that Poss-s develops from genitive (and not from Co-ref pron); use varies cross-linguistically.
- German Poss-s developing in same way as English and Mainland Scandinavian languages.
- Dutch genitive survives despite lack of case system.

References


Thank you.

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Project website:
http://www.ltc.manchester.ac.uk/research/projects/germanic-possessive-s/

Research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.