

## OCP effects in Germanic possession: dialectal and diachronic evidence

The possessor linking construction (PLC) in (1) is widespread across Germanic varieties but there is no consensus on its (syntactic) origin or on the function and categorial status of the bold-faced element. In this paper, we connect insights from the diachrony of genitive-marked possessors with the rise of the PLC. The main argument is that the decline of genitive marking motivates the rise of the PLC, as a strategy to avoid a distinctness violation (OCP effect, Richards 2010) between the possessor and the possessee. This is supported by novel diachronic data from Middle Low German (MLG, c.1250-1600) (CHLG, ReN)<sup>1</sup>, as well as synchronic data from Alemannic (SynALM).<sup>2</sup>

- 1) a. des isch em Vater **sin** Platz (Alemannic)  
this is the.MASC.SG.DAT father his seat  
'this is father's seat'
- b. den Pasturn **sien** ole(n) Hoot (Modern LG, from Berg 2013:36)  
the priest his old(WK) hat  
'the priest's old hat'

Diachronically, we propose that the PLC has its origin in a prenominal genitive construction rather than an external dative as commonly assumed (cf. also Weiß 2012). The dative-hypothesis rests on the assumption that the possessor is commonly dative-marked in most modern varieties. However, as we show, in language stages where genitive is still in use (MLG, Alemannic), the possessor can be genitive-marked, e.g. (2)-(3). Furthermore, in varieties where productive genitive and dative have been lost (modern Low German), it does not need to be clearly case-marked, see (1b), with non-nominative marking. Further support for the genitive origin comes from the fact that the PLC and prenominal genitives share an animacy restriction, see (4), which has a long history for prenominal genitives in German, having started in late Old High German (cf. Demske 2001).

- 2) Men wat in **disses** Mans **syn** **Hovet**  
but what in this.MASC.SG.GEN man.MASC.SG.GEN his.NT.SG.ACC head.NT.SG.ACC  
is begrepen  
is understood  
'But whatever in this man's head is understood...' (MLG: Lauremberg)
- 3) des isch **d-es** Vader-**s** **sin** Platz (Alemannic)  
this is the-GEN father.GEN his seat  
'this is father's seat'
- 4) a. Maria-**s** Buch (NHG, animate possessor)  
Maria.GEN book  
c. \*??**d-es** Buch-**s** Einband (NHG, inanimate possessor)  
the-GEN book-GEN cover

A further diachronic observation informs our claim for the categorial status of the possessive element (*sein-*, *ihr-*) in the PLC. We observe that the decline of genitive case-marking across varieties of German, since at least the middle period (Kiefer 1910), gives rise to ungrammatical examples like (5b), cf. grammatical (5a) where genitive marking is retained. We claim this is due to an OCP effect, i.e. that two adjacent identical syntactic objects require an intervening linking element, without which the structure is ruled out by a distinctness violation (Richards 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Corpus of Historical Low German (CHLG): <https://www.chlg.ugent.be/>  
Referenzkorpus Mittelniederdeutsch/Niederrheinisch (ReN): <https://corpora.uni-hamburg.de/hzsk/de/islandora/object/text-corpus:ren-0.3>

<sup>2</sup> Syntax des Alemannischen (SynALM): <https://cms.uni-konstanz.de/fileadmin/archive/syntax-alemannisch/>

- 5) a. **d-er** vrow-**en** moder (MLG)  
the-GEN woman-GEN.SG womb  
b. \***d-er** Frau Haus  
the-GEN woman house

The type of linking element, as illustrated in Table 1, can vary. The element fulfils two functions; on the one hand, it explicitly marks the possessive relation between the two DPs. However, it is not enough merely to mark the relation as possessive, see (14). Rather, the marker must be placed in a particular structural position, which we call the linking position, see Table 1. We take this as evidence that the marker also functions as a linker, motivated due to an OCP effect. The linker can take the form of genitive marking on the noun (prenominal possessor, (1) and (2)) or on the article (postnominal possessor (10) and (11)). When genitive is not available as a strategy as in e.g. modern non-standard German varieties the possessive article (*sein/ihr*) can fulfill this function as in (8) and (9) or the preposition *von* as in (12). From a diachronic perspective, the well-attested loss of the genitive in German varieties (Kasper 2014) appears to coincide with the rise of the PLC. We thus propose that the possessive element in the PLC is motivated to take over the linking function from the former genitive marker, cf. (9) vs. (13).

DP <sub>a</sub>	Linking Position	DP <sub>b</sub>	Ordering
6) des Mann	-eGEN	Haus (NHG, archaic)	Possessor - Possessum
7) der vrow	-eGEN.SG	moder (MLG)	
8) em Ma	sinPOSS	Hus (Alem.)	
9) dere Frau	ihrPOSS	Hus (Alem.)	
10) das Haus	d-erGEN	Frau (NHG)	Possessum - Possessor
11) das Haus	d-esGEN	Mannes (NHG)	
12) das Haus	vonPP	der Frau (NHG)	
13) * <b>der</b> Frau		Haus	Varying, no linker or linker not in LK-Position
14) * <b>sein</b> Haus		dem Mann	
15) mannen	sitt <sub>RefI</sub> POSS	hus (Norw.)	Varying due to type of linker (Examples from Delsing 1998: 88)
16) huset	hans <sub>POSS</sub>	Per (Norw.)	

Table 1: Adnominal possession in Germanic (All examples mean *the man's house* or *the woman's house* except for the proper name *Per* in (16) and *moder* in (7) meaning 'womb').

We also discuss the relative ordering of possessor and possessee which can vary, see Table 1. Irrespective of the ordering, the linker must always intervene between the two, see (13) and (14). This observation allows us to integrate the Norwegian PLC into our account, which has two variants, one with a reflexive linking element (*sitt*, e.g. (15)) and one with a non-reflexive linking element (*hans*, e.g. (16)). The type of linking element here drives the ordering of possessor and possessee, due to binding restrictions. The reflexive *sitt* must be c-commanded by its antecedent (the possessor), whereas non-reflexive *hans* requires the reverse ordering.

In sum, we will show how these observations can inform a more general account of adnominal possession (including PPs and postnominal genitives), thus leading to a unified analysis of the various adnominal possessive constructions above, including the PLC.

## References

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