

The missing link?

An LFG analysis of the prenominal possessive construction in Low Saxon

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1 Introduction

In this paper, I take a look at one of the three possessive constructions of Low Saxon and provide an elegant LFG analysis for it. I argue that this construction which involves a possessive pronoun as a linker between the possessor and the possessum can be analyzed in a parallel fashion to the LFG standard analysis of pronoun incorporation and pro-drop behavior in verbs (cf. Bresnan 2001, chapter 8). I will furthermore show some parallels to other Germanic languages and raise interesting issues on the syntax and semantics of possessives that deserve further attention.

As I am not a native speaker of Low Saxon myself, I have on the one hand extracted naturalistic data from a corpus of web sites in Low Saxon¹ and on the other hand consulted some native speakers² in order to elicit judgements of rare uses which did not occur in that corpus.

2 The possessive construction in Low Saxon

Low Saxon is a West Germanic language traditionally spoken in Northern Germany and the east of the Netherlands. It is closely related to Dutch, German, and English. Low Saxon uses three different possessive constructions: First, it uses a construction with a post-nominal *vun/von/van*-PP which is largely parallel in structure to the English *of*-construction, cf. example (1). Second, it has a remnant of the “Saxon genitive” construction but this is usually only used in archaic language, with names, or the word *God*³, cf. example (2).

¹I had assembled this corpus for an earlier study on information retrieval in Low Saxon (Strunk 2003a). The corpus contains about 1700 Low Saxon-only documents which comprise about 1,200,000 tokens of running text (including punctuation).

²I have contacted these native speakers via the Internet discussion list Lowlands-L (<http://www.lowlands-l.net/>) which deals with West Germanic languages and cultures other than High German.

³Some northern dialects, e.g. the one of Eckernförde (Helge Tietz, p.c.), seem to make extensive use of this *-s* genitive construction. This could either be a particular development

- (1) *ein Fründ vun denn Preister*
a friend of the-M.SG.ACC priest.M.SG.ACC
“a friend of the priest”
- (2) *dien Naver-s Eegen*
your.M.SG neighbor.M.SG-POSS property.N.SG.NOM
“your neighbor’s property”

Third, there is a construction that could be analyzed as containing a linker in some ways (but not others) parallel to the Kurdish possessive construction (cf. Strunk 2003b). This Low Saxon construction involves a possessor in the dative or accusative case⁴ preceding the possessum and a possessive pronoun that appears in between the two as a linking element, cf. example (3).

- (3) *den Jungen sien Vadder*
the.M.SG.ACC boy.M.SG.ACC his.M.SG.NOM father.M.SG.NOM
“the boy’s father”

I will be concerned mostly with the third construction in this paper.

In example (3), I have glossed *sien* as *his* because the linker in this Low Saxon construction is indeed the usual possessive pronoun, cf. example (4).

- (4) *sien Vadder*
his.M.SG.NOM father.M.SG.NOM
“his father”

Moreover, the linker behaves just like an ordinary possessive pronoun, i.e. it has to agree both with the possessor and the possessum in number and gender and in case with the possessum, cf. examples (5)-(8). In other words, the linker exhibits concord with the possessum and “pronominal” agreement (usually analyzed as involving so-called index features in HPSG, cf. Pollard & Sag 1994) with the possessor⁵. However, it seems to be clear that the possessive pronoun as a linker is obligatorily co-indexed with the accusative or dative DP preceding it. It doesn’t show normal pronominal behavior anymore.

of these dialects or due to Danish influence. Danish as one of the Northern Germanic languages uses this construction quite frequently.

⁴Most Low Saxon dialects have lost the distinction between dative and accusative, but in those that still have it such as Mennonite Plautdietsch (and also in dialects of German), the possessor appears in the dative. In the dialects that have lost it, the possessor is encoded in the accusative (cf. Saltveit 1983, p. 317). In all dialects, clear case distinctions are only maintained for pronouns and some articles, especially M.SG.

⁵This is not very surprising given the fact that this construction is commonly held to have developed by reanalysis from a benefactive or possessor raising construction involving an ordinary possessive pronoun, cf. German *Diesem Mann habe ich seine Haare gewaschen*. (I have washed his_i hair for this man_i.), (cf. Saltveit 1983, p. 317 and Norde 1997, pp. 58-60).

- (5) *de Alwine ehr*
the.F.SG.ACC Alwine.F.SG.ACC her.M.SG.NOM
Brögam
bridegroom.M.SG.NOM
“Alwine’s bridegroom”
- (6) *daem Herr siene Haunt*
the-M.SG.DAT Lord.M.SG.DAT his-F.SG.NOM hand.F.SG.NOM
“the Lord’s hand”
- (7) *wecke Geister ehre Kinner*
what.PL.ACC spirit.PL.ACC their.PL.NOM children.PL.NOM
“the children of what spirits”
- (8) *Un Hagar kreeg mit Ismail tosamen Gott*
And Hagar got with Ismail together God.M.SG.ACC
sienen Segen.
his-M.SG.ACC blessing.M.SG.ACC
“And Hagar together with Ismail received God’s blessing.”

The possessive linker in Low Saxon can co-occur with all sorts of possible possessors, e.g. demonstratives, wh-pronouns, relative pronouns, etc., cf. examples (9), (10), (11), and (12).

- (9) *de ehr Dackel wull*
DEM.PL.ACC their.M.SG.NOM dachshund.M.SG.NOM wanted
partout dat nich doon, wat all Dackel von Natur
at.all that not do, what all dachhund.PL by nature
doot
do
“those people’s dachshund didn’t at all want to do what all dachshunds do by nature”
- (10) *Un well sien Hart dat noch nich*
And who.ACC his.N.SG.NOM heart.N.SG.NOM that still not
kann, kickt Kinner sük as Vörbild an.
can, looks.at children 3.REFL as role.model on.
“And whose heart still isn’t able to do this, looks at children as a role model.”
- (11) *Dit is de Mann, den*
This is the.M.SG.NOM man.M.SG.NOM, RelPrn.M.SG.ACC
sien Huus wi sehn hebbt.
his.N.SG.ACC house.N.SG.ACC we seen have.
“*This is the man whose house we have seen.*”
(Reinhard Hahn, p.c.)

- (12) *de Gott, vör den*
 the.M.SG.NOM God.M.SG.NOM in.front.of RelPrn.M.SG.ACC
siene Herrlichkeit de Minsch heel lütt is
 his.F.SG.ACC glory.F.SG.ACC the man wholly little is
 “God in front of whose glory man is wholly insignificant”

Sometimes though rarely, the possessive linker is even used with preceding personal pronouns. This seems to be possible because of topicalization or contrastive focus, cf. example (13). The pronoun *se* in example (13) is a nominative only form in some dialects. However, it is also used as an accusative form in others. In some dialects, there might even be an animacy distinction between *se* and *ehr*.

- (13) *Un blots se ehr Rupen heff ik*
 And only 3.F.SG.ACC her.PL.ACC caterpillar.PL.ACC have I
doot maakt.
 dead made.
 “And only her caterpillars, I have killed.”

According to Friedrich W. Neumann (p.c.), the pronoun preceding the linker cannot be nominative in his dialect, cf. the ungrammatical example (14) with the grammatical example (15).

- (14) * *he sien book*
 3.M.SG.NOM his.N.SG book.N.SG
 “his book”
- (15) *em sien book*
 3.M.SG.ACC his.N.SG book.N.SG
 “his book”

Some cases where the linker co-occurs with a preceding personal pronoun as possessor seem to involve the need for disambiguation. In some dialects, the 3.PL form *Se* is used as a polite form to address strangers. To distinguish the corresponding possessive pronoun from the usual third person possessive pronoun, people often use the combination *Se ehr*, cf. example (16).

- (16) *Hier kummt Se Ehr Text*
 Here comes 2.HON.ACC PossPrn.2.M.SG.HON text.M.SG
hen
 DEICT
 “Your text will be put here.”

In many northern dialects, a new possessive pronoun has emerged for 3.PL to replace the older form *ehr*. The new form *jümehr* appears to be a transparent composition of the accusative personal pronoun *jüm* plus the old possessive

pronoun *ehr*⁶. This seems to be a clear instance of reanalysis and grammaticalization that has led to a new less ambiguous 3.PL possessive pronoun. Good evidence for this account is that the new form is not only used for emphasis but in all contexts, cf. example (17).

- (17) *De Kinner wörrn flüggriep un güngen so bilütten jümehr*
 The children became fledged and went so slowly their
egen Weeg.
 own way.
 “The children became fledged and slowly but surely went their own
 ways.”

I have not gathered enough data yet, but it seems to be the case that some dialects have fully generalized this new form and even use it as a linker, cf. example (18), while a split seems to have occurred in other dialects where the usual 3.PL possessive pronoun is *jümehr* but the linker is *ehr*.

- (18) *Dit is Peiter und Anna jemmer Bauk.*
 This.N.SG is Peter and Anna their.N.SG book.N.SG.
 “This is Peter and Anna’s book.”
 (Friedrich W. Neumann, p.c.)

The Low Saxon possessive pronoun can also be used alone without an overt possessum. In English, this kind of substitutive possessive pronoun usually has a special form such as *theirs*. This is also true of the neuter singular *seins* in German. The same applies to some possessives in some Low Saxon dialects cf. (19). In Low Saxon, however, the possessive pronoun does not always have a special form when it occurs without a following possessum, cf. example (20), (21), and especially (22) which contains a neuter singular possessive without *-t* suffix.

- (19) *daut Besprenjunksbloot daut baeta raet aus Abel*
 the.N.SG sprinkling.blood.N.SG that better saves as Abel
sient
 his.N.SG.NOM
 “the sprinkling blood that saves better than Abel’s”

- (20) *jeedeen Oort kreeg sienen, de Deerten un Planten*
 every kind got his.M.SG.ACC, the animal-PL and plant-PL
ehren, de Minschen ehren
 theirs.M.SG.ACC the man-PL theirs.M.SG.ACC
 “Every kind got its own, the animals and plants theirs, the people
 theirs.”

⁶In some texts, it is also written as two words: *jüm ehr*.

- (21) *Hans-Ohm leet sik dat garnich so merken, wat Klaas*
 Uncle-Hans let 3.REFL that not.at.all so notice, that Klaas
sien mehr noch bald weern as sien
 his.PL.NOM more still almost were than his.PL.NOM
 “Uncle Hans didn’t let (anyone) notice that Klaas’ were almost more
 than his.”
- (22) *Un nu weet he nich, wat dit sien*
 and now knows he not, whether this.N.SG his.N.SG.NOM
Huus is oder mien oder wat.
 house.N.SG.NOM is or my.N.SG.NOM or what else.
 “And now he doesn’t know whether this is his house or mine or what
 else.”

The combination of possessor plus linker, too, can be used without an overt possessum. In some dialects, the linker also assumes a special form comparable to English *theirs* which contains some inflectional suffixes that show concord with the elided possessum. But these suffixes again only appear in some dialects and not in all genders or numbers, cf. example (23).

- (23) *Dit is Peiter siin Bauk. Peiter*
 this.N.SG is Peter his.N.SG.NOM book.N.SG.NOM. Peter
siin is grötter as Anna ehr’t.
 his.N.SG.NOM is bigger as Anna her-N.SG.NOM.
 “This is Peter’s book. Peter’s is bigger than Anna’s.”

To sum up, the data show that Low Saxon has developed a new highly productive and versatile possessive construction which involves a special possessive linker that has developed out of the ordinary possessive pronoun paradigm. However, this construction is not a rare, isolated phenomenon at all. It occurs in Afrikaans, Frisian, German and Dutch dialects, even in Norwegian⁷, and in a more or less comparable form in many languages around the world. Such a construction is even hypothesized to have been involved in shaping the syntactic characteristics of the English possessive marker *'s* (cf. Fischer 1992, pp. 230-231, but see also Norde 1997, pp. 89-92).

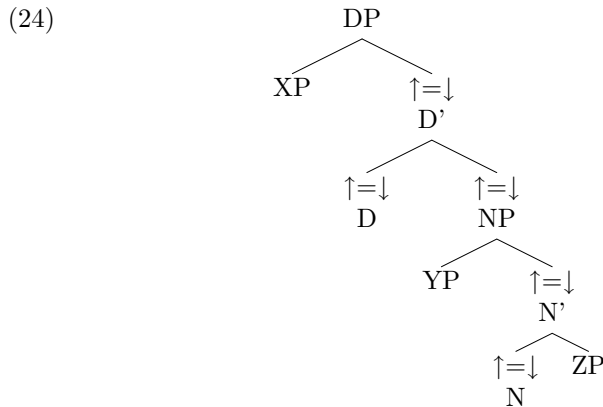
3 LFG analysis

In this section, I will analyze the data presented in the preceding section using the grammar formalism Lexical Functional Grammar. Starting from traditional assumptions about the structure of nominal phrases, I will show how LFG can

⁷These constructions essentially behave the same in all Germanic languages. There are however some minor differences, cf. Norde 1997, chapter 3. The occurrence of this construction in almost all Germanic languages raises the question how old this construction is and whether we are dealing with parallel innovation, common origin, or massive borrowing.

be used to model the Low Saxon possessive linker construction largely parallel to standard analyzes of pronoun incorporation in verbal forms.

In LFG, the nominal phrase is standardly analyzed according to the schema in figure (24). The head noun itself projects an NP, can take a complement, and can be modified by adjective phrases, prepositional phrases, or a relative clause, etc. Determiners such as articles, demonstratives, and certain quantifiers are analyzed as functional words which can project a nominal functional projection called DP which may or may not contain an NP. If the DP contains an NP, the determiner is analyzed as a co-head of the substantive nominal head which projects the NP.

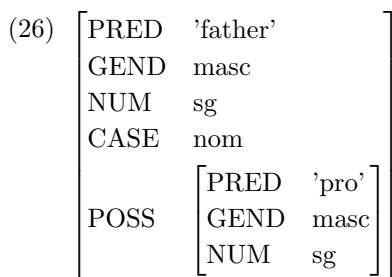
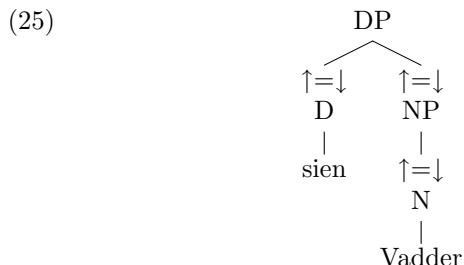


As Low Saxon possessive pronouns like their English or German counterparts are in complementary distribution with determiners such as the definite article and furthermore seem to occupy the same position in constituent structure, I can assume that Low Saxon possessive pronouns also have the category D. In figure (24), D is annotated as a co-head instead of e.g. with an annotation such as $(\uparrow \text{ POSS})=\downarrow$. This is sensible because this position is of course often occupied by non-possessive elements such as articles or demonstratives. This forces us to assume that the lexical entry of the possessive pronoun has to ensure that its features are properly projected into the nominal head daughter's POSS function. This fact will however be very beneficial for my analysis. Recall that possessive pronouns show concord with the possessum and agreement with their antecedent. We can provide for all these facts quite easily by assuming lexical entries like the following for (ordinary) possessive pronouns.

ehr	D	$(\uparrow \text{ POSS PRED})=\text{'pro'}$	sienen	D	$(\uparrow \text{ POSS PRED})=\text{'pro'}$
		$(\uparrow \text{ POSS GEND})=\text{fem}$			$(\uparrow \text{ POSS GEND})=\text{masc}$
		$(\uparrow \text{ POSS NUM})=\text{sg}$			$(\uparrow \text{ POSS NUM})=\text{sg}$
		$(\uparrow \text{ GEND})=\text{neut}$			$(\uparrow \text{ GEND})=\text{masc}$
		$(\uparrow \text{ NUM})=\text{pl}$			$(\uparrow \text{ NUM})=\text{sg}$
		$(\uparrow \text{ CASE})=\text{nom}$			$(\uparrow \text{ CASE})=\text{acc}$

The first three lines model the pronominal possessive interpretation and agree-

ment with the antecedent of the possessive pronoun. The last three lines force gender, number, and case concord with the possessum.⁸ The c-structure for example (4) is shown in figure (25). See figure (26) for the corresponding f-structure.



But how does this fit in with the possessive linker construction where we have an overt possessor? I argued above that in these cases the possessive pronoun that acts as a linker does not show normal pronominal behavior anymore. I will therefore assume that the PRED feature that the possessive projects into the POSS function is optional. This assumption is parallel to analyzes of verbal morphology in pro-drop languages. I propose that the overt possessor occupies the specifier position of the DP, i.e. the position of the XP in figure (24). I furthermore assume that we need a functional equation like (27) as an annotation on the XP node because the possessor seems to be identified structurally and cannot be identified by accusative or dative case alone. However, it could be the case that the specifier of DP is sometimes also occupied by other elements such as quantifiers, as in e.g. *all düsse Lü* (all these people). We should thus use the functional annotation in (28) which also makes sure that the overt possessor has to appear in a certain case, either accusative or dative depending on the dialect in question⁹.

(27) $(\uparrow \text{ POSS})=\downarrow$

(28) $(\downarrow \text{ CASE})=_{c \text{ acc/dat}} \Rightarrow (\uparrow \text{ POSS})=\downarrow$

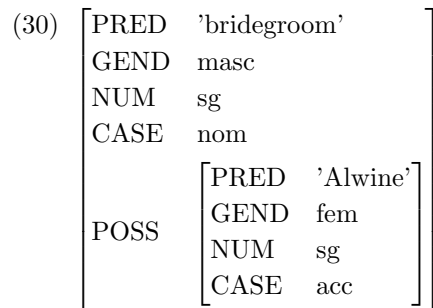
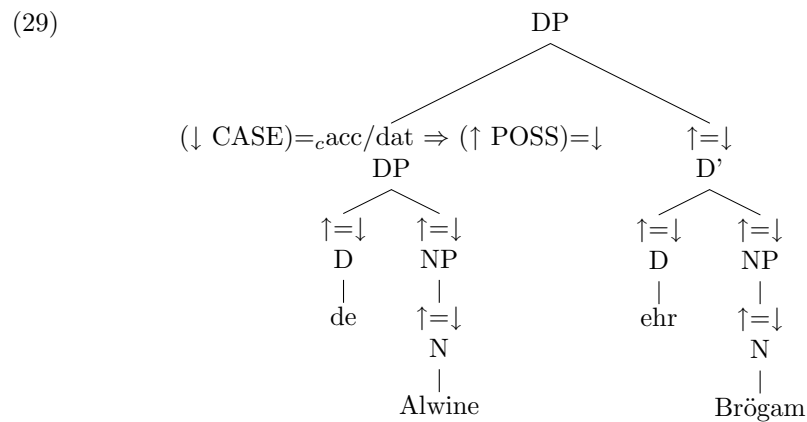
⁸We don't actually have to assume that all agreement features are fully specified. As there is a high degree of syncretism, we can also assume underspecification for some forms.

⁹Alternatively, we could assume that the possessive linker specifies the possessor's case to be dative or accusative. Although this is probably diachronically implausible.

I thus propose the following revised lexical entry:

ehr D ((↑ POSS PRED)='pro') ← *now optional*
 (↑ POSS GEND)=fem
 (↑ POSS NUM)=sg
 (↑ GEND)=masc
 (↑ NUM)=sg
 (↑ CASE)=nom

An analysis for example (4) will then look like the structures in figures (29) and (30).

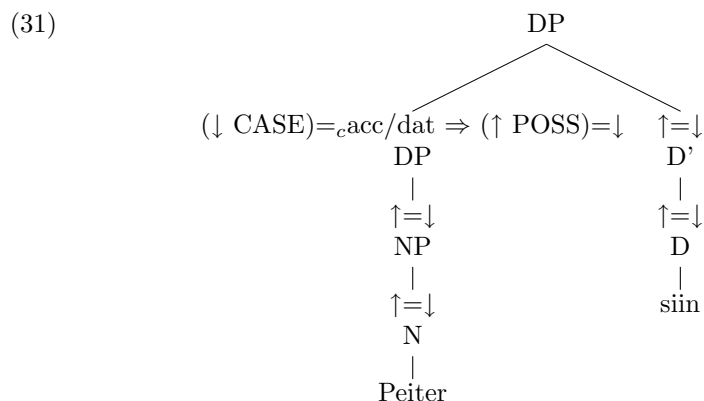


The analysis can thus be extended straightforwardly to the Low Saxon possessive construction. I think it is an advantage of the LFG framework that it can easily model reanalyses that lead to the emergence of new constructions with such subtle differences as the difference between an optional and an obligatory feature. It is more of a theoretical question whether we should just posit one paradigm of possessive determiners with optional PRED feature that can function either as ordinary possessive pronouns or as possessive linkers, or whether we should in fact assume two slightly different paradigms with their own lexical entries.

The only phenomenon that we still have to integrate into our model is the fact that the possessive pronouns (and linkers) can appear without an overt possessum. Although the possessives still show concord with a noun that is not there in the actual utterance, we do not have to assume some kind of deletion analysis, especially since there are sometimes special forms of the possessive that only appear when there is no overt possessum. In fact, I propose an analysis that is entirely parallel to what I assume about the pronominal and linker use of the possessives. The agreement of the possessive with an “elided” possessum can be construed as pronominal agreement with an antecedent¹⁰. We can thus simply use an optional PRED feature again to model these facts and again it is only of conceptual importance whether we duplicate lexical entries or assume entries like the following to model all occurrences of the possessive elements.

sien D ((↑ POSS PRED)=‘pro’) ← *now optional*
 (↑ POSS GEND)=masc
 (↑ POSS NUM)=sg
 ((↑ PRED)=‘pro’) ← *now also optional*
 (↑ GEND)=neut
 (↑ NUM)=sg
 (↑ CASE)=nom

The resulting c-structure and f-structure for the DP *Peiter siin* in the second sentence of example (23) will be (31) and (32).



¹⁰There is however usually no referential identity between the antecedent and the elided possessum but only a “type” identity, cf. the following English example: *This is Mark’s house. And this is Betty’s.* These two sentences talk about different houses.

$$(32) \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PRED} \quad \text{'pro'} \\ \text{GEND} \quad \text{neut} \\ \text{NUM} \quad \text{sg} \\ \text{CASE} \quad \text{nom} \\ \\ \text{POSS} \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PRED} \quad \text{'Peiter'} \\ \text{GEND} \quad \text{masc} \\ \text{NUM} \quad \text{sg} \\ \text{CASE} \quad \text{acc} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

A DP such as *sien* in example (33) would be analyzed the same way except that there is neither an overt possessor nor an overt possessum and the possessive pronoun *sien* supplies a pronominal PRED feature for both the POSS function and the matrix f-structure, cf. the resulting f-structure in figure (34).

- (33) *Hans-Ohm leet sik dat garnich so merken, wat Klaas*
 Uncle-Hans let 3.REFL that not.at.all so notice, that Klaas
sien mehr noch bald weern as sien
 his.PL.NOM more still almost were than his.PL.NOM
 “Uncle Hans didn’t let (anyone) notice that Klaas’ were almost more than his.”

$$(34) \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PRED} \quad \text{'pro'} \\ \text{NUM} \quad \text{pl} \\ \text{CASE} \quad \text{nom} \\ \\ \text{POSS} \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PRED} \quad \text{'pro'} \\ \text{GEND} \quad \text{masc} \\ \text{NUM} \quad \text{sg} \\ \text{CASE} \quad \text{acc} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

Of course, we have to make sure that forms of the possessive that can only occur without an overt possessum have a non-optional PRED feature, whereas forms that only occur with an overt possessum do not have a PRED that is mapped into the whole DP’s f-structure at all, cf. the following lexical entry for such a special form with a non-optional PRED.

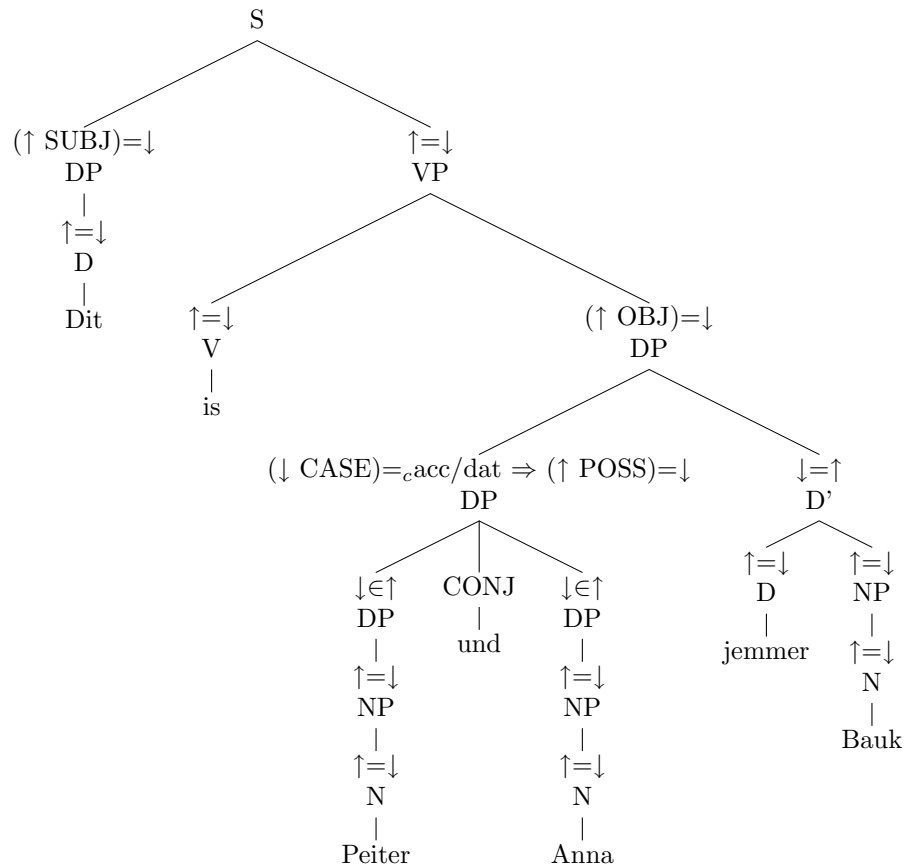
ehrt D ((↑ POSS PRED)=’pro’) ← *now optional*
 (↑ POSS GEND)=fem
 (↑ POSS NUM)=sg
 (↑ PRED)=’pro’ ← *now non-optional*
 (↑ GEND)=neut
 (↑ NUM)=sg
 (↑ CASE)=nom

To sum up, I assume that the whole range of constructions involving the Low

Saxon possessive pronoun paradigm can be modeled in LFG by assuming a kind of “nominal pro-drop behavior”. The possessive pronouns basically contain two optional PRED features: one for the possessor and one for the possessum. This essentially symmetric nature of the possessives (they could be regarded as “transitive pronouns”) is also needed to provide for the agreement facts.

To conclude this section, I will give an analysis of example (18)¹¹.

(35)



¹¹For this paper, it is irrelevant whether copula clauses such as (18) should be analyzed differently from what I present here, e.g. using the grammatical function XCOMP.

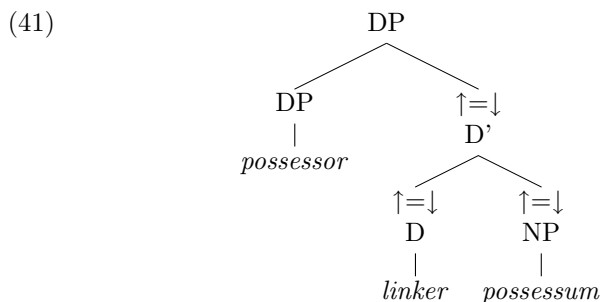
that the structural analysis I presented in the preceding section seems to make the right predictions.

- (39) *Peter sien un Hinnerk sien*
 Peter.M.SG.ACC his.N.SG and Hinnerk.M.SG.ACC his.N.SG
Hus sünd schön.
 house.N.SG.NOM be-PL beautiful.
 “Peter’s and Hinnerk’s house(s) are beautiful.”

Although the only overt noun *Hus* (house) in the subject is singular and the verb *sünd* clearly selects for a plural subject, the sentence is grammatical because it is understood as: *something belonging to Peter (quite likely a house) and Hinnerk’s house are beautiful*. In fact, it seems to be the case that whenever there are two possessive linkers, only a distributive reading is possible, i.e. the two possessors possess separate entities and not a single one collectively. This is the reason why example (40) with a singular verb form is ungrammatical¹².

- (40) * *Peter sien Hus un Hinnerk*
 Peter.M.SG.ACC his.N.SG house.N.SG and Hinnerk.M.SG.ACC
sien is schön.
 his.N.SG be-SG beautiful.
 “Peter’s house and Hinnerk’s is beautiful.”

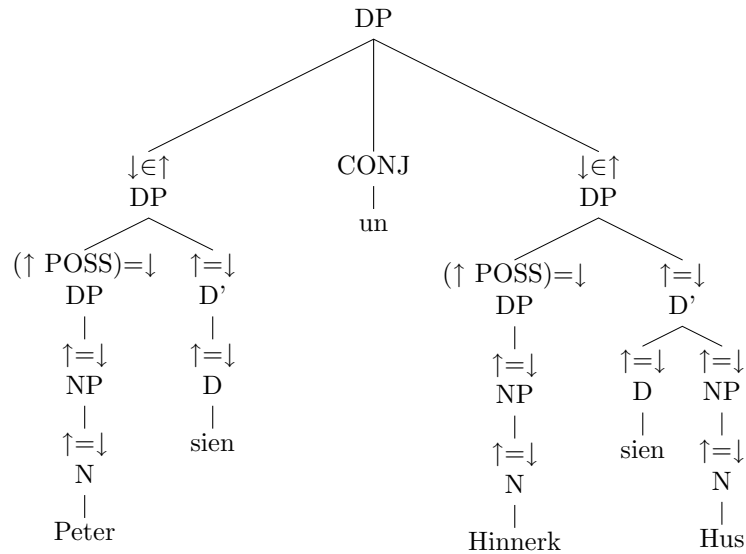
This is predicted by my account because the possessive linker can introduce a pronominal PRED feature for the possessum (thus allowing an interpretation with two possessed entities even if the only overt possessum appears in the singular) and there is no way to coordinate combinations of possessor plus linker because they do not form a constituent, cf. figure (41).



The only possible c-structure configuration for the subject in example (39) is the structure in figure (42) which involves coordination of two complete DPs and not a coordination of possessors.

¹²Even if the possessum is elided after the first possessor and appears overtly after the second possessor, a singular verb form seems to be ungrammatical.
 * *Peter sien un Hinnerk sien Hus is schön.*

(42)



As we are dealing with coordination which is modeled using set-valued f-structures in LFG, there is no way in which the one overt possessum can be structure-shared by both possessors because the information about the possessum in either conjunct cannot escape from there.

It would be interesting to know whether these facts hold cross-linguistically. A comparative study of this construction in Germanic maybe even including parallel constructions in other languages could shed light on this question¹³.

What is indeed very interesting is that the so-called "Saxon genitive" construction (which is used to a greater or lesser extent in all Germanic languages) seems to show a similar behavior, cf. also Norde 1997, p. 49. If this is true it would raise interesting issues about the morphological and syntactic structure of this construction and its semantic interpretation. For English, it is generally acknowledged that the 's possessive can attach to the right edge of a whole nominal phrase as well as to a head noun, cf. example (43). In fact, I would even argue that it always has to attach to the right edge of a possessor phrase, cf. the grammaticality contrast between (44) and (45).

(43) the girl I saw yesterday's mother

(44) * the man's on the mountain daughter

(45) the man on the mountain's daughter

The same phenomenon seems to occur in the Scandinavian languages, cf. example (46)¹⁴.

¹³See Norde 1997, chapter 3 for a short overview of the facts in Germanic.

¹⁴Taken from the following web document:
www.d.kth.se/namnder/dbuggen/arkivet/2002/n0lledbuggen2002.pdf

- (46) *någon vi känners fel*
 someone we know-POSS mistake
 someone we know's mistake

Even in German, examples like those above are not ungrammatical, cf. example (47). In German, however, this possessive construction is in general only used with proper names. The whole possessor in (47) therefore has to be interpreted as a proper name, in this case as the name of an Austrian pop band¹⁵.

- (47) *Antonia aus Tirol-s neue CD*
 Antonia from Tyrol-POSS new CD
 Antonia from Tyrol's new CD

Examples like (43) are usually used to motivate a phrasal affix analysis of the English 's possessive. It seems though that all Germanic languages show bracketing paradoxes of this sort at least with coordination. According to my own intuitions, example (48) is the natural construction to use when talking about an entity belonging to two possessors which are proper names in German¹⁶.

- (48) *Eike und Inka-s Haus*
 Eike and Inka-POSS house
 Eike and Inka's house

The same seems to be true for Swedish, cf. example (49)¹⁷.

- (49) *Bläddra i Per och Anna-s fotoalbum.*
 Browse in Per and Anna-POSS photo.album
 Browse in Per and Anna's photo album.

In Swedish, the -s possessive is not only used with proper names. Accordingly, one can find examples like (50)¹⁸.

- (50) *Men om de kunnat förändra mannen och*
 But if they could.have changed man.DEF and
kvinnan-s roll-er med tiden, ...
 woman.DEF-POSS role-PL with time.DEF
 But if they were able to change man and woman's roles with time, ...

All these examples show that the -s possessive in all Germanic languages shows the behavior of a "phrasal affix", i.e. mismatches between its seeming morphological status as an affix, its syntactic placement at the right edge of the possessor phrase, and the wide scope it takes over conjoined possessors. For

¹⁵This of course raises the issue whether a name is really an ordinary syntactic construction that is fully integrated into the clause. But see below for more convincing data for German.

¹⁶The intuitions seem to be the same for English and the Scandinavian languages, cf. Norde 1997, pp. 82-84.

¹⁷www.informatik.umu.se/~svph9929/ommig.html

¹⁸www.utb.falun.se/hbo/projekt/religion/religionht98/JV/familj.htm

English and even for the Scandinavian languages this phenomenon often called “group genitive” is usually acknowledged in decent grammars¹⁹.

But grammars of German and Dutch treat the possessive *-s* as the form of the genitive used with proper names (e.g. Götze & Hess-Lüttich 1989, p. 141, Flämig 1991, p. 467 for German, and Geerts et al. 1984, p. 697 for Dutch). At least in German, the variable positioning of the possessor phrase before or after the head noun is an argument in favor of this view, cf. examples (51) and (52).

(51) *Peter Müller-s Haus*
 Peter Müller-POSS house
 Peter Müller’s house

(52) *das Haus Peter Müller-s*
 the house Peter Müller-POSS
 Peter Müller’s house

However, this leaves unexplained why examples like (48) are possible in German, why the possessive *-s* disappears if the proper name is used together with a determiner in the genitive as in example (53) and why proper names usually do not show the same *-s* suffix after prepositions that govern the genitive like *trotz*, cf. (54)²⁰.

(53) *das Haus des Peter Müller*
 the house the.GEN Peter Müller
 Peter Müller’s house

(54) *trotz Peter Jackson*
 in.spite.of Peter Jackson
 in spite of Peter Jackson

Also consider examples (55) and (56) taken from Norde 1997, p. 55. While the right edge of the whole complex name that is the possessor has to be “inflected” in the prenominal position, the postnominal genitive normally shows the expected behavior: only the head noun itself carries a genitive suffix.

(55) *Wolfram von Eschenbach-s “Parzival”*
 Wolfram of Eschenbach-POSS “Perceval”
 Wolfram von Eschenbach’s “Perceval”

(56) *der “Parzival” Wolfram-s von Eschenbach*
 the “Perceval” Wolfram-GEN of Eschenbach
 Wolfram von Eschenbach’s “Perceval”

¹⁹See e.g. Allan et al. 2000, p. 29 for Danish, Holmes & Hinchcliffe 1997, p. 43 for Swedish, and Norde 1997, chapter 3 as an overview over the phenomenon in Germanic.

²⁰www.stuttgarter-zeitung.de/page/detail.php/481715

It seems to me that even in languages like German or Dutch, the possessive *-s* (as opposed to the real genitive as far as these two can be distinguished) shows a behavior that is parallel to that of the English or Scandinavian possessives²¹.

My reason for giving all these data is to show that the pronominal possessive *-s* construction in *all* Germanic languages does not function like the genitive case and should accordingly be distinguished from it. Indeed, it would not be too far-fetched in my opinion to regard this construction as a linker construction, too. The pronominal possessive *-s* construction in Germanic is thus not a case at all but a possessive linker that appears between possessor and possessum. As Norde 1997, chapter 3 observes, the behavior of the Low Saxon-style linking construction and the *-s* possessive is “strikingly similar” (page 49). An LFG account of the *-s* possessive would therefore ideally be largely parallel to the account of the Low Saxon construction I have studied in this paper. However, the old question whether the possessive *-s* is an affix or a clitic comes up again, cf. Zwicky 1987. The scopal potential of *-s* is clearly in conflict with traditional assumptions about affixes as the following quote from Miller (1992) illustrates:

If an item must be repeated on each conjunct in a coordinate structure, then it must be an affix and cannot be a PLC [post lexical clitic].

If an item must fail to be repeated on each conjunct in a coordinate structure, then it must be a PLC and cannot be an affix.

If one concludes from this that the *-s* morpheme is a clitic or a phrasal affix, this conclusion has to be taken over to all Germanic languages. I am however not convinced that this really solves the problem. I want to finish this paper by pointing out that such mismatches between morphology, syntax, and semantics involving linkers of one kind or another seem to be very widespread. Moreover, a clitic or phrasal affix analysis does not always seem to be possible.

In Kurdish, a linker has to appear between a head noun and a postnominal modifier and also between two modifiers that modify the same head noun. In Strunk 2003b, I argued that this linker morpheme traditionally called *ezafe* is an affix when it appears on the head noun and a clitic when it stands between two modifiers. A very interesting mismatch between morphology and syntax arises in the interaction between *ezafe* and coordination. In a coordination of nouns that are jointly modified by a post-nominal element only the last noun carries an *ezafe* marking (glossed as *EZ*) and the form of this *ezafe* marking is determined only by that noun’s gender and number alone. However, the clitic *ezafe* marker appearing after the first modifier agrees with the whole conjoined NP and appears in the plural form accordingly, cf. example (57).

- (57) *Xwîşk û bira-k-i wê=yên piçûk*
 sister and brother-INDEF-EZ.M.SG.INDEF her=EZ.PL little
he-ne.
 exist.

“She has little sisters and a little brother.”

²¹This view contrasts with the view expressed in Norde 1997, p. 83.

The Kurdish postnominal linker clearly shows the same kind of bracketing paradox as the various Germanic possessive linkers although their functions are not the same. Moreover, a clitic or phrasal affix analysis of the *ezafe* on the head noun is very implausible because of the agreement facts and because all other inflectional affixes such as case suffixes are suppressed on post-modified nouns which only carry the *ezafe* suffix instead (cf. Strunk 2003b for a more thorough outline of these facts.)

It turns out that nominal syntax is a very fruitful area for testing traditional assumptions about the borders between morphology and syntax. Modern linguistics should thus give up its unbalanced concentration on verbal syntax and explore the interesting phenomena that occur in nominal phrases.

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