Possessives and the distinction between determiners and modifiers (with special reference to German)

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1. THE POSSESSIVE TYPOLOGY: DETERMINER OR MODIFIER?

1.1 *Determiner-Genitive vs. Adjectival-Genitive*

In Section 5 of his paper on 'The syntax of English genitive constructions' Christopher Lyons (1986) distinguishes 'determiner-genitive' (DG) and 'adjectival-genitive' (AG) languages, depending on whether genitives, including possessive pronouns, perform determiner (or specifier) or modifier function. English is a DG language: genitives in determiner function force a definite interpretation (*John's/his house* 'the house of John/him', **'a house of John's/his'*), with an alternative, complement construction having to be resorted to to express indefiniteness (*a house of John's/his*); possessives thus pre-empt the use of a definite article (**the his house*) and prohibit the use of an indefinite article (according to Lyons 'a cardinality expression generated in mod[ifier] position', **his a house*). Italian is an AG language: possessives are generated in the modifier rather than the determiner slot and thus neither pre-empt a definite article in determiner function (*la sua casa*) nor prohibit an indefinite article (*una sua casa*, according to Lyons's reasoning for English presumably also in a modifier position, preceding possessive and adjectival modifiers). Spanish is both a DG and an AG language, with possessives functioning as determiners when prenominal ((**la/*una) su casa*) and as modifiers when postnominal (*la/una casa suya*, with the long form of the pronoun as opposed to the prenominal short form).

1.2 *Non-uniformity of nouns*

There are potential difficulties for a typology such as this which do not, however, perforce undermine it. Thus, on the face of it, Italian is not really strictly AG across the board: with a subset of nouns, namely kin terms other than hypochoristic *mamma* 'mum' and *babbo* 'dad' and diminutives, possessives (except non-agreeing third person plural *loro*) do pre-empt a definite article when these nouns are unaccompanied by prenominal or

postnominal adjectives ((*la) sua sorella 'his/her sister';[1] but la sua cara sorella 'his/her dear sister', la sua sorella maggiore 'his/her older sister', la sua sorellina 'his/her little sister'), while not prohibiting an indefinite article (una sua sorella 'a sister of his/hers'). One hesitates to adopt Lyons's Spanish solution here, providing a determiner slot for pronominal possessives as an alternative to the more regular modifier slot, since the difference is not one manifesting itself in the position or the form of these possessives themselves, but is exclusively a matter of the nouns which they happen to accompany and the presence or absence of adjectival modifiers. On the evidence of the permissible indefinite article and of the obligatory appearance of a definite article when such kin nouns are elided (sua sorella...la mia 'his/her sister...mine'), one might argue that pronominal possessives after all are modifiers throughout, with the determiner slot perhaps filled by a definite article without overt realization or perhaps even by the appropriate kin nouns themselves.[2] Whatever solution one prefers for such cases, there is little here to suggest that the basic distinction between the two functional slots open to possessives, those of determiners and modifiers, is non-categorical.

1.3 Distributional differences between demonstratives and definite articles

There are languages where demonstrative pronouns require a co-occurring definite article such as Maltese (dan il-ktieb 'this the-book'), Hungarian (ez a könyv 'this the book') or Welsh (y llyfr hwn/yma 'the book this/here'), which presumably suggests the existence of two determiner slots for these items. In other languages which have these kinds of words (or also corresponding affixes) there is only a single determiner slot available to be occupied alternatively by a demonstrative or a definite article. Distributional differences between demonstratives and definite articles in some languages of the latter kind present a more fundamental problem for Lyons's scheme of DG and AG types, casting doubt on the necessarily categorical nature of the determiner–modifier distinction.

    Unlike definite articles, demonstratives used to co-occur with possessives in English, and examples such as the following, while not encountered frequently (and rarely accounted for in grammars), are not entirely ungrammatical even today:

(1) (a)   Both of them used to talk pleasantly of this their first journey to London. (James Boswell, Life of Johnson, 1791)

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[1] While in fact not ungrammatical for all speakers of Italian, la sua sorella etc. are generally second choice vis-à-vis the versions without article.

[2] See Longobardi (1991) for a case for the second, unorthodox alternative.

   (b)   Granting that the White Whale fully incites the hearts of *this my* savage crew, ... (Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, 1851)

   (c)   He told them that the house of theirs to which he alluded was *this their* church in which he now addressed them for the first time. (Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers*, 1857)

In contemporary German, where the presence of a demonstrative may incline some speakers to prefer a prepositional possessive construction (as in (2a)), others, among them Chancellor Kohl, use NPs such as (2b) quite naturally.[3]

   (2) (a)   dieses Land von uns
             'this country of us'
       (b)   dieses unser Land
             'this our country'

It should be noted that it is only pronominal possessives which show this pattern; neither in English nor in German (even that of Chancellor Kohl) do non-pronominal possessive phrases combine with demonstratives:

   (3) (a)   *this Captain Ahab's savage crew (with the meaning 'this savage crew of Captain Ahab's')
       (b)   *diese Kanzler Kohls Rede
             'this Chancellor Kohl's speech'

Unlike pronominal possessives, non-pronominal ones in German may also be in postnominal position, and then freely combine with all kinds of determiners and with the indefinite article (*diese/die/eine Rede Kanzler Kohls* 'this/the/a speech of Chancellor Kohl's'), which suggests that what is in postnominal position, even though it is in the genitive like its prenominal counterpart, does not occupy a determiner slot.

   In Old English, where the simple demonstrative was about to be grammaticalized as definite article, both this emerging article (4a) and the remaining (proximal) demonstrative (4b) could co-occur with possessive pronouns in typical AG manner.

   (4) (a)   seo heora iugoþ
             'the their young-people'
       (b)   þas mine word
             'these my words'

In Old, Middle and earlier Modern High German, the definite article, likewise originating from the simple demonstrative, could also co-occur with possessive pronouns. What both languages have undergone, on such distributional evidence, thus, appears to be a change away from full AG-hood. But how best to account for their current status?

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[3] The distal demonstrative is less frequently found to co-occur with a possessive: ?*jenes unser Land* 'that our country'.

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Since definite articles and demonstratives do not co-occur with each other in contemporary German or English (both DG languages by Lyons's criteria), one hesitates to assume two different syntactic slots for them solely on the strength of their differential co-occurrence possibilities with possessives.[4] One alternative, in a framework of discrete syntactic functions, is to admit pronominal possessive words to two different functional slots, *à la* Spanish, but without differences in linear order: as determiners they would pre-empt the use of a definite article in the determiner slot while as modifiers[5] they would permit demonstrative determiners. For (archaic or formal) English there appears to be no morphosyntactic or semantic evidence that might be adduced in favour of this latter alternative of variable syntactic functions for pronominal possessives. Unless one is prepared to recognize – to my mind implausibly – an asyndetic co-ordination of two determiners in NPs such as *this my savage crew*, it seems that a further functional slot, intermediate between those of determiners such as demonstratives and articles and of modifiers and imposing a demonstrative-only requirement on the authentic determiner slot, has to be assumed for pronominal possessives.[6] In German there is inflectional evidence in addition to the distributional kind suggesting that pronominal possessive words are not always genuine determiners; but what this ambivalence points to is that the functional distinction between determiners and modifiers is not necessarily categorical in the first place.

2. GERMAN POSSESSIVES AND THE DETERMINER–MODIFIER CONTINUUM

2.1 *Declensions and how to choose between them*

Possessive pronouns in German inflect like the indefinite article (and *kein* 'no'), as is exemplified for *unser* 'our' in Table 1. Adjectives have two sets of inflections, the weak (Table 2) and the strong (Table 3), here exemplified

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[4] Of the languages whose demonstratives need to be accompanied by definite articles, some (including Maltese and Welsh) prohibit possessives from co-occurring with definite articles, hence also with demonstratives, while others (among them Hungarian) do not, pointing to impeccable DG and AG status, respectively. In Welsh it in fact used to be possible to have a possessive pronoun (in lieu of the definite article) preceding and a demonstrative following a noun (*fy mab hwn* 'my son this' (Luke xv. 24); see Williams, 1980: 58); since definite articles did not co-occur with possessives, this archaic form of Welsh thus resembles German and (archaic) English.

[5] Instead of a straightforward modifier slot one might provide a separate slot solely for possessives, distinct from those of both determiners and modifiers, as suggested by Vincent (1988a: 54) for those Romance languages where articles and possessives co-occur.

[6] Those who (like Huddleston, 1988: 86f.) recognize three determiner subslots in English NPs (*all* [I] *these/the* [II] *ten/several* [III] *churches*) would accordingly have to split up subslot II (*all* [I] *these/*the* [IIa] *our* [IIb] *ten/several* [III] *churches*).

	MascSg	NeutSg	FemSg	Pl
Nom	unser-∅	unser-∅	unser-e	unser-e
Acc	unser-en	unser-∅	unser-e	unser-e
Gen	unser-es	unser-es	unser-er	unser-er
Dat	unser-em	unser-em	unser-er	unser-en

Table 1
Inflection of possessives

	MascSg	NeutSg	FemSg	Pl
Nom	schön-e	schön-e	schön-e	schön-en
Acc	schön-en	schön-e	schön-e	schön-en
Gen	schön-en	schön-en	schön-en	schön-en
Dat	schön-en	schön-en	schön-en	schön-en

Table 2
Weak adjective declension

	MascSg	NeutSg	FemSg	Pl
Nom	schön-er	schön-es	schön-e	schön-e
Acc	schön-en	schön-es	schön-e	schön-e
Gen	schön-en	schön-en	schön-er	schön-er
Dat	schön-em	schön-em	schön-er	schön-en

Table 3
Strong adjective declension

with *schön* 'beautiful'. The strong declension is also known as pronominal because demonstratives, interrogatives and certain other pronouns, and in fact also the definite article (NomSgMasc *d-er* etc., with a few complications in forms such as Nom/AccSgNeut *d-as* and Nom/AccSgFem and Nom/AccPl *d-ie*), take essentially the same set of desinences. The single exception is genitive singular, where these pronouns prefer *-es* over *-en*, especially in the company of weak nouns, which themselves lack distinctive genitival form (cf. *dies-es/-en Mann-es* 'this-GenSg man-GenSg' (strong noun), *dies-es/*-en Held-en* 'this-GenSg hero-GenSg' (weak noun)). For the definite article, and likewise for possessives and the indefinite article, *-es* is obligatory under such circumstances (**d-en/*ein-en/*unser-en Mann-es*).

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Disregarding the numerous homonymies, a comparison of these three tables shows that the desinences of possessives and the indefinite article are largely identical to those of the strong declension of adjectives and pronouns. It is merely the zero marking of NomSgMasc and Nom/AccSgNeut and the obligatory desinence *-es* for GenSgMasc/Neut which are peculiar to possessives and the indefinite article (with this second trait being shared with the definite article).

The basic rule for the selection of weak or strong adjectival forms is this: an adjective inflects weakly if preceded by an article, pronoun or numeral with a strong desinence, and strongly otherwise. The adjective in (5), with the NP consisting solely of an adjective and a feminine noun and with the preposition governing the dative, thus inflects strongly, while that in (6) inflects weakly, being preceded by the strongly inflected indefinite article.

(5) mit schön-er Aussicht
     'with beautiful view'
(6) mit ein-er schön-en Aussicht
     'with a beautiful view'

The non-strong zero desinence of Nom(/Acc)Sg masculine and neuter possessives and the indefinite article counts as weak for these purposes. Compare (7) to (8), where a strongly inflected demonstrative requires a weakly inflected adjective:

(7) unser-∅ schön-es Land
     'our beautiful country'
(8) dies-es schön-e Land
     'this beautiful country'

2.2 How to decline possessives after demonstratives

Now, if a pronominal possessive is combined with a preceding demonstrative, how does it decline? As is seen in (9), unambiguously in fact only in (9a), the answer appears to be: like a possessive not preceded by a demonstrative, in other words, like pronominal words occupying the determiner slot.

(9) (a) dies-es unser-∅ Land
         'this our country' (Nom/AccSg Neut)
    (b) dies-e unser-e Heimat
         'this our native land' (Nom/AccSg Fem)

If possessives were here in the modifier rather than the determiner slot, they should inflect like adjectives do in this environment, that is, weakly; but this they categorically do not in such examples:

(9') (a) *dies-es unser-e Land

Weak and strong inflections for feminines are homonymous in the

nominative/accusative singular; thus the corresponding weakly inflected feminine possessive would be *unser-e*, just like that in (9b). There are genuinely adjectival possessives, derived by suffix *-ig* and probably more popular in southern than in northern German, and these do in fact inflect like adjectives:

    (10) (a) dies-es unsrig-e Land
        (b) dies-e unsrig-e Heimat

In the dative singular, however, post-demonstrative possessives do have a choice, at least for some speakers, of inflecting strongly (11), as they do without demonstratives, or weakly (11'), as ordinary adjectives would do in this environment:

    (11) (a) in dies-em unser-em Land
        (b) in dies-er unser-er Heimat
    (11') (a) in dies-em unser-en Land
        (b) in dies-er unser-en Heimat

The strongly inflected, unadjective-like possessives are generally preferred here, though. Of thirty informants consulted by means of a questionnaire, twenty-six judged (11) to be better than (11'), with (11a) and (11b) receiving average grades of 1.5 and 1.4 respectively, while the average grades of (11'a) and (11'b) were 3.0 and 3.1 respectively.[7] Only two informants (nos. 25 and 2) preferred (11') to (11); one (no. 24) preferred (11'a) to (11a) while preferring (11b) to (11'b); and one (no. 5) saw absolutely no difference between them.

In the genitive singular of all genders (a, b), the genitive plural (c) and the nominative/accusative plural (d), there is an analogous possibility, although probably even more marginal than in the dative singular, of post-demonstrative possessives alternating between the weak (12') and the impeccable strong declension (12).

    (12) (a) dies-es unser-es Landes
        (b) dies-er unser-er Heimat
        (c) dies-er unser-er Länder
        (d) dies-e unser-e Länder
    (12') (a) dies-es unser-en Landes
        (b) dies-er unser-en Heimat

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[7] There were four grades: 1 = perfectly grammatical, 4 = totally ungrammatical, 2 = closer to 1 than to 4, 3 = closer to 4 than to 1. The questionnaire study is fully documented in the Appendix. In my collection of examples attested relatively recently all of the more literary ones are like (11), such as *In diesem seinem Elternhause verlebte Gottfried Keller seine Jugendzeit 1821–1848* 'In this his parental house spent Gottfried Keller his youth 1821–1848' (to be found on a plaque at the Haus zur Sichel, 9 Rindermarkt, Zürich). In the case of Chancellor Kohl's innumerable relevant utterances, however, I have never been quite able to determine whether he inclines towards *unserem* (11a) or *unseren* (11'a).

(c) dies-er unser-en Länder
(d) dies-e unser-en Länder

These examples were not included in the questionnaire, but judging by informal enquiries those in (12′) are in general rated slightly lower than their analogues in (11′) and much lower than their counterparts in (12), but still do better than (9′a), with a weakly inflected post-demonstrative possessive considered strictly ungrammatical.

The adjective-like inflection of pronominal possessives under these various circumstances – a marginal possibility for most speakers, and a real alternative or even preference for a few – might be taken to indicate that such possessives are words capable of functioning either as determiners or as modifiers. Since possessives inflecting like adjectives do not, however, share other properties of genuine modifiers as well, in particular the distributional one of being able to co-occur with definite and indefinite articles,[8] it would seem to be more plausible to conclude that the distinction between determiners and modifiers in German is basically non-categorical, with pronominal possessives tending to partake of both determinerhood and modifierhood, though more of the former than of the latter.

The question, then, is why possessives are able to share inflectional properties of typical modifiers only under certain circumstances (least marginally in the dative singular of all genders, more marginally in the genitive of all numbers and genders and in the nominative/accusative plural feminine) but not at all under others (in the nominative singular masculine and the nominative/accusative singular neuter).

There are in fact other instances of adjectives being able to choose between (expected) strong and (unexpected) weak inflections in the dative singular, but such indeterminacies are not entirely analogous in so far as they are restricted to masculine and neuter. Thus, if two masculine or neuter adjectives, not preceded by an article, pronoun or numeral requiring that they be weakly inflected, are asyndetically co-ordinated, the first must be strongly inflected, but the second may take the strong (13) or the weak (13′) form:

(13) (a) mit schön-em weit-em Blick
      (b) mit schön-er weit-er Aussicht
(13′) (a) mit schön-em weit-en Blick
      (b) *mit schön-er weit-en Aussicht
           'with beautiful wide view' (*Blick* is masculine, *Aussicht* feminine)

[8] Nor are there any semantic differences, however subtle, correlating with the different inflections of possessives – comparable, for instance, to those observed in languages such as Italian with adjectives such as *diverso*, which, when leaving their modifier position for a determiner position, take on a quantifier sense (cf. *i miei diversi amici* 'my various friends' – *diversi miei amici* 'several of my friends'; see Vincent, 1988b: 298).

Similarly if an adjective follows a personal pronoun:

(14) (a)   dir arm-em Schlucker
             'to you poor wretch (Masc)'
      (b)   dir arm-er Sünderin
             'to you poor sinner (Fem)'
(14') (b)   dir arm-en Schlucker
      (b)   ??dir arm-en Sünderin

In the case of possessives, there are also speakers who accept the weak dative form after a demonstrative more readily with masculines and neuters than with feminines. Of the thirty informants consulted, eleven judged (11'a) to be better than (11'b); only four judgements (those of nos. 6, 12, 13, 14) were the other way round; and the rest saw no difference. There are, however, no adjectival parallels to the non-dative-singular instances of possessive weak–strong alternations.[9]

The comparison of the possessive (and strong) with the weak paradigm might provide a clue to the peculiar restriction of possessive weak inflections. As is shown in Table 4, conflating Tables 1, 2 and 3 (non-pronominal strong

	MascSg		NeutSg		FemSg		Pl	
	Weak	Poss	Weak	Poss	Weak	Poss	Weak	Poss
Nom	-e	-∅ (-er)	-e	-∅(-es)	-e		-en	-e
Acc	-en		-e	-∅(-es)	-e		-en	-e
Gen	-en	-es(-en)	-en	-es(-en)	-en	-er	-en	-er
Dat	-en	-em	-en	-em	-en	-er	-en	

Table 4
Comparison of possessive (and strong) and weak declensions

desinences are given in parentheses), there are various homonymies between possessive/strong and weak declensions, involving the desinences *-en* and *-e*. In the cases, numbers and genders where weak and strong desinences are homonymous – AccSgMasc (*-en*), Nom/AccSgFem (*-e*), DatPl (*-en*) – overt contrasts in the inflection of possessives such as those in (9a/9'a), (11/11'), and (12/12') are thus precluded. If there were some kind of pressure on

[9] The fact that these parallels are so limited would seem to argue against an analysis of demonstrative–possessive sequences as asyndetic co-ordinations of two determiners, with the second word alternating between essentially strong and not-so-expected weak inflection in the manner of an asyndetically conjoined adjective. Also, in the dative singular feminine, asyndetically conjoined adjectives do not alternate between strong and weak (12b/12'b) while possessives do (10b/10'b).

possessive pronouns to display properties of modifierhood, owing to the presence of words (namely, demonstratives) which are more prototypical occupants of the determiner slot, here would be a good place to do so with respect to inflectional ones, because it could be done, as it were, clandestinely. Having weak adjectival inflections instead of possessive ones in the dative singular, thus -en instead of -em (Masc/Neut) and -er (Fem), would be more noticeable, even though there would still be some formal similarity between the desinences concerned (especially between -em and -en, both being vocalic and ending in a nasal, with /m/ and /n/ possibly coinciding in informal speech owing to assimilations). Moreover, -en is the desinence responsible for two homonymies of possessive (four of strong) and weak declensions anyway. Having weak -en instead of possessive -es (GenSgMasc/Neut), -er (GenSgFem, GenPl) and -e (Nom/AccPl) would be equally noticeable or, in the case of -e, lacking a final consonant, even more so. But again, the desinence acquired would always be one that is homonymy-prone, namely -en. In the nominative singular masculine and nominative/accusative singular neuter, however, possessive and weak inflections are in stark contrast: zero marking, characteristic exclusively of possessive pronouns and the indefinite article (and kein 'no'), here contrasts with an overt desinence, namely -e. Admittedly, -e is also involved in a weak–possessive (strong) homonymy, but this is in a gender (feminine) other than the ones (masculine and neuter) where zero would have to be replaced by this desinence.

In actual fact, these formal similarities and dissimilarities of possessive (and strong) and weak paradigms appear to account remarkably well for the piecemeal manner in which possessive pronouns may share the inflectional behaviour of adjectives in the company of demonstratives. When co-occurring with demonstratives, ranking high (though presumably not highest) in determiner-worthiness, possessive pronouns, partaking in many respects of determinerhood themselves but being presumably less determiner-worthy than demonstratives, are most likely to display those inflectional modifier properties which are formally most similar to their own.

It was with respect to the synchronic variation of generally preferred and dispreferred alternatives that possessive pronouns, typically inflecting more like determiners, were said to share (or even 'acquire' or 'adopt') modifier inflections. Diachronically, in view of the earlier suggestion (section 1.3) that German, like English, has been moving away from strict AG status in so far as possessives have ceased to co-occur with definite articles, the directionality to be assumed here would be one of possessives exchanging modifier for determiner properties rather than the other way round. The overall trend of inflectional developments is, however, less clear than that of distributional ones (see Behaghel 1923: 349–359). Unlike adjectives, possessive pronouns originally inflected strongly or were uninflected when preceded by demonstratives or definite articles (or also otherwise). Since late Old High German the tendency has been for them to follow the weak declension instead, thus

aligning inflectionally with adjectives. Thus, weak forms of possessive pronouns such as (15), corresponding to currently dispreferred alternatives, have been around for quite some time, though continually co-existing with strong or uninflected forms.

(15) (a) OHG dise unseren ziti 'these our times' (Nom/AccPl) [~ 12'd]
(b) MHG der minen helfe 'the my help' (GenSg Fem) [~ 12'b]
(c) Early ModHG die ewren hent 'the your hands' (Nom/AccPl) [~ 12'd]

To be consistent with the distributional trend towards increasing determiner-hood, such weak forms of possessive pronouns, characteristic of modifiers, ought to be past their prime rather than on the up-and-up. Time will tell. (Fortunately, Chancellor Kohl, the leading living supplier of relevant utterances, shows no signs of flagging.)

2.3 *How to decline possessives after demonstratives when followed by adjectives*

In German the choice between strong and weak inflections of determiners and modifiers is as a rule determined from left to right: no word normally interferes with this choice for a word preceding it. One exception, already alluded to, is provided by demonstratives and certain other pronouns demanding the desinence -*es* rather than -*en* in the genitive singular when there is no distinctively genitival word following them within their NP.[10] Possessives following demonstratives are the only other exception to this rule: when in turn followed by an adjective (as in (16/16')), the likelihood of the possessive to inflect weakly increases considerably.

(16) (a) in dies-em unser-em schön-en Land
(b) in dies-er unser-er schön-en Heimat
(16') (a) in dies-em unser-en schön-en Land
(b) in dies-er unser-en schön-en Heimat

Of my thirty informants, twenty judged (16') to be better than (11'), ten marginally so, with a difference of one grade, and ten significantly so, with differences of two or three grades; four (nos. 22, 26, 29, 2) saw no difference; four (nos. 7, 12, 13, 25) found (16') to be marginally worse than (11'); and of the remaining two, one (no. 9) preferred (11'a) to (16'a) but (16'b) to (11'b), and the other (no. 6) preferred (16'a) to (11'a) but (11'b) to (16'b). The average grades of 2.5/2.3 for (16'a/b) and 3.0/3.1 for (11'a/b) reflect this influence of a following adjective upon the inflection of possessive pronouns. What is not revealed by these average grades is that a group of ten speakers

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[10] This reflects a general requirement on the distinctive encoding of genitives, on which see Plank (1980).

(nos. 8–28 in Table I of the Appendix) who preferred a strongly (or pronominally) inflected possessive pronoun when there is no following adjective, awarding better grades to (11a/b) than to (11'a/b), actually tended to prefer weak inflections when an adjective follows, awarding better grades to (16'b) than to (16b) or to (16'a) than to (16a). Interestingly, there were no informants who were absolutely consistent in their reversal of preferences, limiting it either to feminines (16b/16'b) or to masculines and neuters (16a/16'a).[11]

An adjective following a demonstrative and a pronominal possessive also improves the acceptability of weakly inflected possessives in the non-dative-singular contexts exemplified above in (12'). In fact, even in the nominative singular masculine and nominative/accusative singular neuter, where possessive and weak inflections are most dissimilar, which presumably accounts for the strict ungrammaticality of (9'a), a following adjective may encourage the possessive pronoun to inflect weakly, like the adjective itself. Thus, many speakers, informally consulted, were much happier with (17') than with (9'a), while mostly preferring 'regular' (17) to (17').

(17)   dies-es unser-∅ schön-es Land
(17')   dies-es unser-e schön-e Land

The two weakly inflected elements after a strongly inflected demonstrative in (17') are in accordance with the normal left-to-right rules, given that both are categorized as words with modifier function in asyndetic co-ordination. Thus, compare (17') with (18):

(18)   dies-es weit-e, schön-e Land
      'this wide, beautiful country'

In addition to the formal similarity of some possessive (or strong) desinences to the corresponding weak ones characteristic of adjectives, the company of an adjective thus appears to be a further incentive for possessive pronouns to behave like modifiers. Formal similarity of desinences – this time syntagmatic rather than paradigmatic – may be a factor here too: possessive nominative(/accusative) zero, resisting the replacement by weak -e in the absence of an adjective, gives in only if there is a following adjective capable of taking weak -e as well.

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[11] Informal enquiries suggest that some speakers even admit, as a marginal possibility, strongly inflected adjectives after the strongly inflected possessives in (16):

(i) in dies-em unser-em schön-em Land
(ii) in dies-er unser-er schön-er Heimat

Such sequences of strong desinences are reminiscent of the pattern found with asyndetically co-ordinated adjectives (cf. (12)). If the strongly inflected possessives were obligatorily categorized as pronouns, it would be against the above left-to-right rule for a following adjective to be strongly inflected.

3. ATTRIBUTION AND PREDICATION

Inflectional evidence like that presented in Section 2 seems best accounted for by a non-discrete conception of syntactic functions, with determinerhood decreasing and modifierhood increasing gradually from articles (at any rate definite ones) to demonstratives and to pronominal possessives.

Numerals are another kind of word which have sometimes been mentioned as being intermediate between prototypical determiners and modifiers, with their ability to occur predicatively as well as attributively, just like most adjectives, betraying modifier qualities. Possessive pronouns in German also occur in predicative function, and a comparison with adjectives in this respect once more points to the inappropriateness of categorical distinctions between syntactic functions.

In German, adjectives, which inflect for case, number and gender and alternate between weak and strong declensions when used attributively, shed all inflections when used predicatively. The difference is always conspicuous because inflected adjectives never have zero desinences (see Tables 2 and 3 above). Inflected possessive pronouns do have zero desinences in the nominative singular masculine and the nominative/accusative singular neuter; and in the corresponding predicative uses it is therefore impossible to tell whether they retain zero marking or are, like adjectives, uninflected:

(19) (a)   dies-es mein-∅ Land
           'this my country'
     (b)   Dies-es Land ist mein.
           'This country is mine.'
     (c)   Ich nannte dies-es Land einmal mein.
           'I called this country once mine.'

This situation is, in a way, comparable to the one we encountered above (Section 2.2) where, owing to homonymies, determiner and modifier inflections were overtly indistinguishable. It is possessives with non-zero desinences which show that there indeed is a likeness to adjectives in so far as inflections are abandoned:

(20) (a)   dies-e mein-e Länder
           'these my countries'
     (b)   Dies-e Länder sind mein.
           'These countries are mine.'
     (c)   Ich nannte dies-e Länder einst mein.
           'I called these countries once mine.'

Allowing possessive pronouns to be generated in the same syntactic slots as adjectives would seem to account for this parallelism. However, this likeness to adjectives, the prototypical modifier and predicative words, is again incomplete. Totally unlike adjectives, possessive pronouns in predicative

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function may alternatively be inflected according to the strong declension, so as to agree with their subject or object in case, number and gender:

(19′) (b) Dies-es Land ist mein-es.
     (c) Ich nannte dies-es Land einst mein-es.
(20′) (b) Dies-e Länder sind mein-e.
     (c) Ich nannte dies-e Länder einst mein-e.

With dummy subjects *es* 'it' and *das* 'that' inflection of predicative possessives is in fact obligatory. Elsewhere it is strongly preferred as the stylistically unmarked option.

4. POSTSCRIPT ON NP OR DP

If inflectional behaviour is anything to go by, the syntactic functions performed by possessive pronouns and adjectives, in languages such as German, must be recognized as being different yet similar.

There currently rages a controversy over headship in what used to be innocuously referred to as NPs.[12] To the extent that determinerhood is gradient, as I have argued it is in German, shading off into modifierhood, so should headship be, assuming that it is not nouns which head their phrases. Should nouns, however, turn out to be the better candidates for headship after all, the inflectional evidence discussed here would seem to be neutral as to the categorical or gradient nature of their functional hegemony.[13]

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[12] It was anticipated in an unpublished and widely unread paper entitled 'Adnominal adjectives or adjectival nouns', rashly, but perhaps not entirely without justification (as it seems to me now), turned down by the *Journal of Linguistics* in early 1976.

[13] I am grateful to Stefanie von Mende for reminding me of Lyons (1986), to Peter Eisenberg for reminding me, among other memorable things, of Plank (1980), and to Guglielmo Cinque, Edith Moravcsik, Nigel Vincent and an anonymous reviewer for further useful reminders and leads. An earlier version of this paper formed part of *Eurotyp Working Paper* VII/11 (1991).

Appendix: Results of questionnaire study[14]

1. *Grades awarded to individual examples by individual informants*

Informant	Examples								Average grade
	11a	11′a	11b	11′b	16a	16′a	16b	16′b	
1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1.1
5	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1.6
6	1	4	1	1	1	2	1	2	1.6
3	1	2	1	3	1	2	1	2	1.6
4	1	2	1	3	1	2	1	2	1.6
7	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	3	1.6
12	1	3	1	2	1	3	1	3	1.9
13	1	3	1	2	1	3	1	3	1.9
15	1	3	1	4	1	3	1	3	2.1
16	1	4	1	4	1	2	1	3	2.1
17	2	3	1	4	1	3	1	3	2.3
19	1	4	1	4	1	4	1	3	2.4
22	1	4	1	4	1	4	1	4	2.5
26	1	4	1	4	1	4	1	4	2.5
21	2	4	1	4	1	3	1	4	2.5
29	1	4	3	4	1	4	1	4	2.8
30	3	4	2	4	2	3	2	3	2.9
8	1	3	1	3	1	2	2	1	1.8
9	1	2	1	3	1	3	2	1	1.8
10	1	2	1	4	1	2	3	1	1.9
11	1	2	2	3	1	2	3	1	1.9
18	1	4	1	4	1	2	4	1	2.3
23	1	4	1	4	1	4	3	2	2.5
27	1	4	3	4	1	4	4	1	2.8
14	1	4	1	2	4	1	1	2	2.0
20	2	3	2	3	3	2	2	3	2.5
28	2	4	2	4	3	2	2	3	2.8
24	4	2	1	4	3	1	4	1	2.5
25	4	1	3	2	4	2	2	2	2.5
2	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1.5

[14] In the questionnaire, examples were presented in the same order as in the tables, with additional examples in between eliciting judgements of NPs with possessives unaccompanied by demonstratives and with possessive adjectives in *-ig*.

2. Number (and percentages) of informants awarding grades 1–4

Example	Grades				Average grade
	1	2	3	4	
11a	21 (70.0%)	6 (20.0%)	1 (3.3%)	2 (6.7%)	1.5
11'a	3 (10.0%)	8 (26.7%)	6 (20.0%)	13 (43.3%)	3.0
11b	21 (70.0%)	6 (20.0%)	3 (10.0%)	0 (00.0%)	1.4
11'b	2 (6.7%)	7 (23.3%)	6 (20.0%)	15 (50.0%)	3.1
16a	23 (76.7%)	2 (6.7%)	3 (10.0%)	2 (6.7%)	1.5
16'a	5 (16.7%)	12 (40.0%)	7 (23.3%)	6 (20.0%)	2.5
16b	16 (53.3%)	8 (26.7%)	3 (10.0%)	3 (10.0%)	1.8
16'b	10 (33.3%)	6 (20.0%)	10 (33.3%)	4 (13.3%)	2.3

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